

PRACTICAL STAGE HANDBOOKS

STAGECRAFT

Practical Stage Handbooks

ACTING
STAGE MAKE-UP
PLAY PRODUCTION
STAGE COSTUME
STAGE MOVEMENT
STAGE SPEECH
STAGE LIGHTING
SEEING A PLAY
FESTIVALS AND ADJUDICATIONS
ETC.

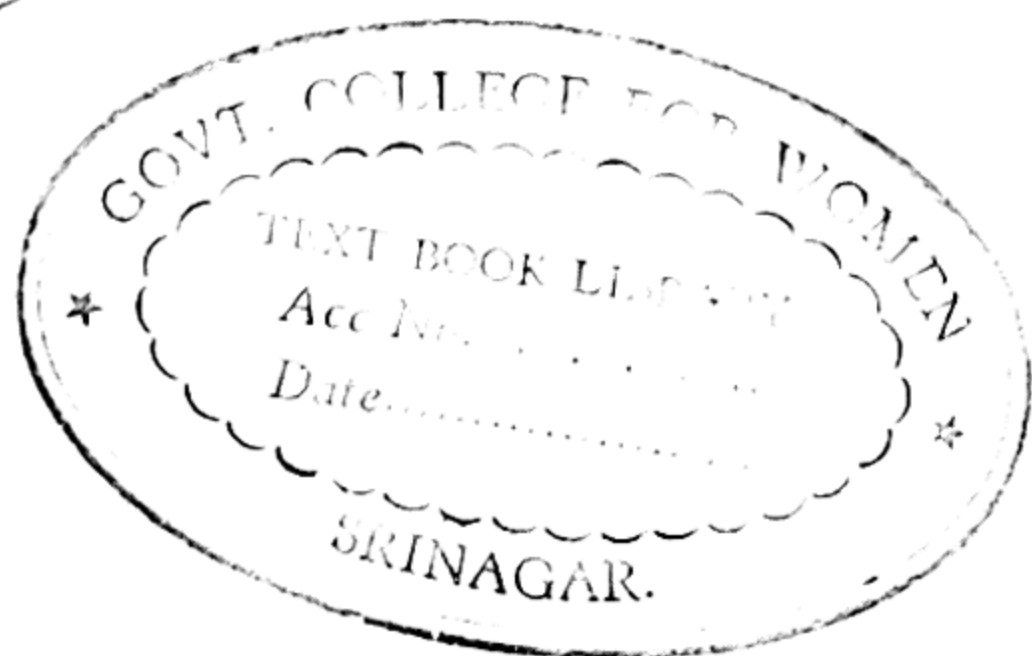
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Practical Stage Handbooks
General Editor : HAROLD DOWNS

STAGECRAFT

by
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FOREWORD BY DONALD WOLFIT
PREFACE BY HARCOURT WILLIAMS

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FOREWORD

by DONALD WOLFIT

THIS series of PRACTICAL STAGE HANDBOOKS is intended for those who have come to know the indefinable magic of the theatre. Their first experience of this may have arisen out of regular theatregoing, with memorable performances to give pleasure in recollection, or through personal work done to advance the Amateur Theatre.

This magic invariably stirs in the mind of the theatre-lover the desire for further knowledge of all the activities that contribute to the complex Art of the Theatre—acting, producing, costuming, make-up, lighting.

In schools and factories, in clubs and civic centres, interest that is created in the theatre is often followed by the determination to become a producer or a player, or to work "behind the scenes." But interest is not enough; knowledge is necessary. Some of this is, no doubt, acquired in haphazard fashion. The volumes in this Series will be of practical assistance to all to whom they are designed to appeal, thus adding knowledge to interest and strengthening what is often the irresistible magnetism of the theatre.



PREFACE

by HARCOURT WILLIAMS

ONCE I overheard a child say, as it looked gloomily at its square yard of allotted garden, "I do hate my hobby!" If to act as an amateur is to pursue a hobby, I wish that the word could lose its present implication of incompetence and revert to its original meaning. Whether one is a professional actor or an amateur it is essential that one should *love* one's "hobby."

The Amateur Stage, since its spectacular revival after the First World War, has done much for the English-speaking theatre and deserves to be taken seriously.

The authors of this book are under no misapprehension about the hard work involved in the practice of stagecraft. Their information is both lucid and exhaustive. Here the stage manager is the *deus ex machina*, the man who pulls the strings. Gordon Craig has insisted that the S.M. should be of supreme importance in the theatre, and deplored his fall from power when the modern "producer" made his entrance at the opening of the twentieth century.

One of the theatre's assets is illusion, or it was until we professional actors sold our heritage for a mess of potage cooked in Fleet Street and elsewhere. Our duty is to salvage what we can. It is good, therefore, to turn the pages of this book, dispassionately set out and designed neither to give away the tricks of the trade nor for uncritical "fans" and trivial seekers after "back-stage" gossip, but to appeal to the keen, bright-eyed, would-be workers in the theatre.

The general public, viewing the stage from the auditorium, have little conception of how businesslike and normal life behind the scenes must be. Consequently, those who enter it for the first time are apt to confuse the excitements of painting their

faces and disporting themselves in antic costumes before the footlights with the very essence of acting.

Those, however, who approach the job seriously and are ready to renounce social pleasures if they interfere with its practice, also those who are prepared to accept the rigid discipline of the theatre and its inevitable disappointments, will experience the joy that is the crown of work well worth doing.

To achieve acting at its best all vanities must be discarded. Self-consciousness, self-satisfaction, and the foibles of egotism must be cast off, until, stripped bare like the stage when it is ready for the first rehearsal, the actor stands ready to accept the children of the author's imagination and to develop these in the light of his own experience.

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CHAPTER I

THE STAGE MANAGER

THE stage manager (referred to as S.M. throughout this book) is the man or woman who is responsible for the branch of amateur theatricals that is known as stagecraft. We must, therefore, define "stagecraft" as it is dealt with in this book.

Briefly, stagecraft deals with the *practical* side of all that is seen and heard when a play is presented to an audience, and includes costuming, make-up, and lighting. Here we are not concerned in detail with these three branches of stagecraft because (1) they are separately dealt with in this Series, and (2) our experience is that costumes and make-up are best left to the producer and cast alone—though when the S.M. comes to design his set he will need to know the colours of the costumes that will be worn so that he can work out his own colour scheme with these in mind. (See Chapter III.) All but the simplest of electrical lighting equipment will call for the services of an electrician. Usually, the layman will be able to receive instruction from the caretaker or electrician of the hall or theatre booked for the production; or the group may have its own electrician. In any circumstances, lighting will have to be taken into consideration by the S.M., if only to enable him to remind the producer of the limits of the effects that can be obtained. (For a few general principles of lighting, see Chapter V.)

There are, then, the stage itself, the set, properties, and effects. The set consists of the scenery as seen by the audience; properties include furniture and the various objects used throughout a performance; effects denotes the different means of producing noises on or off the stage and any other unusual

visual features (rain, fog, wind, background music, etc.). Our point of view is that of the small dramatic group as distinct from the large, affluent, and highly organized society, which usually has its carpenters, property masters, décor designers, and electricians; in short, it has a "residential stage staff." The small society is lucky if it has one man to cope with all these tasks.

The Stage Manager

What are the qualities desirable in the small group's "omnibus" manager who often works single-handed, or with willing but untrained help? He should be practical, have an eye for method, a clear brain, and "mechanical sense." We do not suggest that he need be an engineer or a builder; but he should know when to use a screw and not a nail; a bolt and not a screw. He needs method and a clear brain because he may find he is the only member who does not suffer from producer's tension or actor's nerves at the dress rehearsal or the final performance. As such he is a valuable corrective. Ideally, he should be on good terms with his colleagues and capable of inspiring confidence and calm. If he has a sense of humour, he will help to make amateur dramatics a pleasure.

Function

What is the S.M.'s function in the small society? What is he expected to do, and how does he do it?

We have taken a typical example of the part played by an S.M. from the time the play is chosen, up to, and including, its actual public performance. Circumstances vary widely because of differing drama groups, stages, and general facilities. The keen S.M. soon devises his own tricks and methods.

A full-length play is assumed, but the general principles apply to the stage management of one-act plays. Firstly, the S.M. should be in evidence at the beginning of the production enterprise, i.e. when the play is chosen. He should be a member of the executive committee, be in a position to advise on the practical possibilities of staging the suggested

play, and have a sound idea of the cost. To be able to do this he will need to read the play carefully and so bear in mind both the size of the stage that will be used and the facilities that will be available. The play with a single set throughout will be less troublesome than one that requires a complete change of scene. When a play has several different scenes a different approach is necessary; realism will have to be abandoned; only symbolical or suggested scenes will be possible. (See Chapter III.)

The possibilities of modifying and adapting a play to suit a small stage should not be overlooked. Careful study will reveal what set, properties, and effects are essential, and what can be omitted. Often the S.M. must exercise much ingenuity, but although a play may be cut, it must not be added to or altered.

When the play has been chosen, the S.M. is ready to tackle his first job—the preparation of his script.

CHAPTER II

PLANNING

Preparing the Script

TO stage-manage a play several notes will have to be made by the S.M. in relation to the text, actors' moves, lighting, effects, etc. These notes, together with the text of the play, are known as the "script." It should be regarded as a valuable document from the first. It is not always realized that a well-prepared script can make for smooth running, both at rehearsals and during the actual production to the public. It often happens that understudies are expected to be able to replace absent actors, and it should be possible for someone to take over from the S.M. should he be forced to drop out at a late stage; a clearly annotated working script is thus a safeguard.

The practice of scribbling notes all over a copy of the play is to be deprecated; to mark borrowed books is even more reprehensible. The copy of the play is usually in the form of a soft-covered volume, and from this the script is prepared. If the play is expensively bound, or forms one of a collection, the only really satisfactory method of dealing with it is to have it typed. The leaves of the play are interleaved with sheets of plain paper, and it facilitates working if the sheets are all on the left-hand side and the text of the play is on the right. To do this with printed copies two books are needed. The leaves are carefully separated from the binding, and by taking one from each book alternately they can be arranged in order and re-bound on the left side by means of punched holes threaded with tape or string. Stiff cardboard for the outer covers is necessary, for the script will receive hard wear.

By thus having the text constantly on the right and the notes on the left a ready scanning is made easier during re-

<u>S. M.</u>	<u>Prompter.</u>	
WARN sound record No 2 groove 3.	a Pause	Martin: I see.
WARN Curtain.	(1) Exit U.R.	a (he kisses her)
* FADE IN music CURTAIN.	(2) Exit U.C.	Until later, my dear.
Strike Tray. Kill lights. WARN lights cue 2.		(1) (He exits by the front door. Jane picks up her skirts and runs upstairs as
FADE IN music record 2		* the Curtain falls.
* Bring up lights - cue 2		Scene 2. Sc. The Same. Two hours later. When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness except for the glow from the fire. Jane enters down the stairs. She carries a lighted lamp, a dressing bag, *

Fig. 1. Prompt Copy, Open.

hearsals and productions, but, if desired, the script can be prepared by using one copy only. Then the blank sheets will appear on alternate sides of it. A few extra sheets back and front will be found useful for general notes. The interleaving sheets should then be ruled in two columns, the left being for the S.M.'s notes, the right for the producer's moves (i.e. his instructions to the cast). (See Figure 1.) An added refinement is to number the speeches in the text, and if the producer and cast do likewise with their copies, a quick reference is available. ("... go from speech 5, page 17..." etc.)

"Vetting" the Text

This should be done in consultation with the producer. It consists of extracting the necessary information from the text. At the back of acting editions will usually be found a list of properties and furniture, properties being the various portable articles, such as cigarettes, books, etc., used by the performers. This list can be used, but, in addition, the play should be scrutinized, and the properties and furniture listed under three headings, Furniture, Stage Dressings, and Properties. Only those articles of furniture essential to the play should be listed, and the sources of supply should be noted as soon as possible (i.e. the firm from which it is to be hired, or the members of the society lending parts of their home). By stage dressings are meant the drapes, tablecloths, ornaments, etc., which are not moved during a scene and which may not be essential to the action (being used to "dress" the stage). Properties are further divided into two groups: stage properties, the responsibility of the S.M., and hand properties, for which the cast are responsible. As with the furniture, a note is made of where the stage dressings and properties are to be obtained. Special requirements for lighting and sound effects should also be noted at this stage, e.g. which effects will best be achieved manually (with wind machine, bells, coconut shells, etc.) and which will be better obtained by recordings.

On one of the blank pages at the front of the script should be drawn a ground plan of the setting of each scene, showing the

position of the furniture, etc., each being marked clearly with the act and scene. It is also a good idea for the beginner to "square off" one of these plans in order to show to which part of the stage the various directions in the script apply. (Up Centre, Down Left, etc. See Figure 2.) It will be seen that "right" is the actor's right, not the audience's. Other terms such as Prompt Side and Opposite Prompt may be met with, the former indicating the left, the latter, the right, but in practice the prompter may be either side. The terms are not reliable, and lead to possible confusion. (The prompter will take a position as directed by the S.M.)

Other pages in the script can be used for notes of curtain music, incidental music (with its duration), the running-time of each scene, the allocation of jobs to stage helpers, an estimate of the time needed for scene-changing (upon which the length of the intervals may depend), etc., while on the "working" pages in the body of the script can be noted opposite the appropriate cues the lighting effects (in green), sound effects (in red), and general notes of changes of scenery, etc. (in blue), using ink for a clear reference and permanent record. (See Figure 1.)

Finally, a "thumb" index will facilitate quick reference to the notes and scenes. Loose-leaf ledger tabs can be used, or gummed tabs stuck at the tops (or sides) of the pages.

The above preparations can all be made before rehearsals start. We deal with the use of the script at rehearsals and productions in later chapters.

Surveying the Stage

The ground plans mentioned above are not to scale. They are only diagrams that indicate positions. For designing his set the S.M. will need to make a larger drawing to scale. He should, therefore, visit the hall to inspect the stage, to make his survey, and, while on the spot, sum up the general facilities that are available.

Stages vary enormously. For purposes of illustration we will assume a stage of some 30 ft. by 15 ft., high enough to take

scenery 10 ft. high. These are overall measurements, covering the entire stage. The considerably smaller area left after erecting scenery is known as the "acting area." (See Chapter III.) An assistant at the survey is desirable. For those who are unused to making plans, we mention that the first step is to draw roughly the shape of the stage as it would appear to an observer above it. (See Figure 3.) The positions of stairs, doors, lights, etc., are shown. Accurate measurements, as below, are then made, the final scale drawing being prepared at home, preferably on graph paper ruled in $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. squares, a scale of $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to the foot being used. (Graph paper ruled in $\frac{1}{10}$ -in. squares is not so convenient when working in feet and inches.) It will be necessary to measure the depth of the stage (i.e. the distance from footlights to rear of stage) the width (from wall to wall), the distance between the front curtains when opened, the approximate size of the acting area (making due allowance for the footlights should they be covered at the time of the survey), and the position of the overhead battens (i.e. the permanent lights arranged in one or more rows over the stage). When planning visibility (lines of sight) it is also useful to know the position of the extreme ends of the front row of seats used by the audience.

Measurements of the elevation (the stage as seen from the front) may also be useful. Accurate measuring will call for step-ladders, but estimates may have to suffice. They should include the height from floor of stage to top of proscenium arch (i.e. the "frame" through which the audience sees the play), and the height to the curtain rail. The height of the battens, cross-beams, and top-of-stage fittings generally (sometimes known as "the grid") may also be required. The grid is often masked by one or more "borders." It should be ascertained if these are adjustable or permanently fixed.

Before leaving the hall, the S.M. should check, and note, the following: Location of switchboard, dips and sockets (i.e. electricity points), and the position the switchboard operator will be in when operating the lights; the location of the switches controlling the house (audience) lights; the possibility

of a separate socket and switch for an amplifier; (if linked with the general lighting, the amplifier may cease to work if lights are turned off during the play). Some halls are fitted with dimmers, i.e. sliding switches capable of graduating lights from full brightness to zero. The S.M. should find out with what points and sockets these are connected. Stage lighting is dealt with in a volume specially written for this Series, but the S.M. will need to know the above details when planning his production.

The type of front curtains and their control should be noted. They are likely to be one of two types. "Tableau," or "festooned," curtains are drawn up and to the side, permitting a quick curtain. "Draw" or "trailing" curtains slide along a rail and are slower in operation. Either type may be controlled by a drum and handle, or by ropes. To avoid confusion "on the night" (see Chapter VII) it is essential to know exactly how to handle these controls.

Unusual structural features, such as pillars on the stage, low roof beams, etc., which are likely to interfere with scenery, should be observed. Some stages have a rake, i.e. a slight slope from the back down to the footlights. This slope can be ignored, as any slight trouble it gives when the set is being erected can be put right (see Chapter VII). The S.M. may also meet with the sprung stage. This calls for no special consideration, except that he can be assured that the alarming squeaks caused by walking on the empty stage will disappear when the scenery and furniture are in place.

Existing scenery, back-cloths, rostra or steps that are often lying about the hall, may prove useful and, if required, permission to use them should be sought: it is not safe to assume that they will still be about when the society puts on its play.

If the particular production is insured, the insurance company may require the society to nominate a fireman—usually he is the S.M. The fire-fighting appliances should, therefore, be located, and noted on the plan. These must always be accessible and unobstructed.

Dressing-room accommodation should also be inspected.

To comply with county council or other legal regulations separate accommodation for men and women should be available. If only one room is available, this can be curtained.

Finally, on leaving, the S.M. will ascertain the best point for unloading his scenery.

Good relations with the caretaker of the school or hall are essential. The S.M. is very much in his hands, and, although he will wish to consult him on several points, the caretaker's time and other commitments should be respected. The society's treasurer may have cause to regard the "Gratuity to Caretaker" as a worthwhile expense.

CHAPTER III

DESIGNING AND MAKING THE SET

Designing the Set

THE S.M. is now ready to design his set. He can base his ideas on the photograph sometimes shown in the text; he can be guided by the description set out in the play; he will certainly also need to use his imagination.

His main task, as designer, is to give the audience something pleasing to the eye and suitable to the action and atmosphere of the play, yet allowing the cast and stage staff to move with a minimum of trouble. Being also the stage manager, he will, by now, have a good knowledge of the play.

No hard and fast rules can be laid down, owing to the variety of stages and plays, but, first, the approximate acting area should be marked on the ground plan with dotted lines (see Figure 3), and on these lines should be shown the position of the doors, windows, stairs, fireplace, etc. He can then better judge how much space he will have for his furniture: when this is in position it is often surprising how little space there is left—hence the emphasis (in Chapter II) on essentials. It may be necessary to adjust the set to accommodate the furniture, e.g. to make a recess to take a couch or table. It should be remembered that the more physical action in the play, the more space is required for acting; in a “wordy” play, more space can be taken up by furniture, but if the play features duels, fights, crowd scenes, dancing, etc., cramping should be avoided. Costumes should be borne in mind; one player in a crinoline can take up the room of two people in modern dress.

The easiest design is the straightforward three-walled set (back and two sides), but alcoves and angles can be introduced

to make the scene more interesting. The set is often "splayed" (see Figure 2), i.e. it tapers slightly towards the back. This aids visibility (as the line of sight from the extreme ends of the front row of the audience will readily show). The maximum use should be made of a stage, remembering that depth (from the back of the stage to the footlights) is as valuable to a producer as width. Sometimes, for example, a door U.C. is required on a very shallow stage. The whole set need not be brought forward to allow this door to open, for the door can be set at an angle. (See Figure 4.) Unless essential to some incident in the play, doors should open outwards, into the wings; they should be hung with the hinges up-stage in order to allow more room for exits and entrances, and the backing is less visible. (See Figure 5.) Doors should be sited according to the producer's wishes and the demands of the text; the position of a window is less important and can usually be at variance with the text without unduly upsetting the moves of the play. All openings have to be "backed" with a painted flat or a draped curtain (see Figures 4 and 5) so that an audience, looking through the window or door, will see something appropriate to the scene, e.g. the wall of the next room, a blue sky, trees, etc. The lighting of these backings should not be overlooked. (See Chapter 5.)

A little research into styles of architecture may be necessary to get the correct effect of period. Photographic accuracy is not essential, but an audience will usually notice glaring anachronisms. Most periods of history have their distinctive features of ornament and decoration, and a restrained use of these motifs will suggest the period adequately. There are useful and detailed books on this subject. (See Chapter IX.) Obviously the type of set should fit the style of the play and its production. A play written in verse or "elevated prose" will call for a dignified background; elegant dialogue of the Restoration period requires its elegant furniture and interior; the robust vigour of Elizabethan comedy would ill-accord with flimsy chairs and tables and delicate curtains.

The value of differing acting levels is often overlooked. The

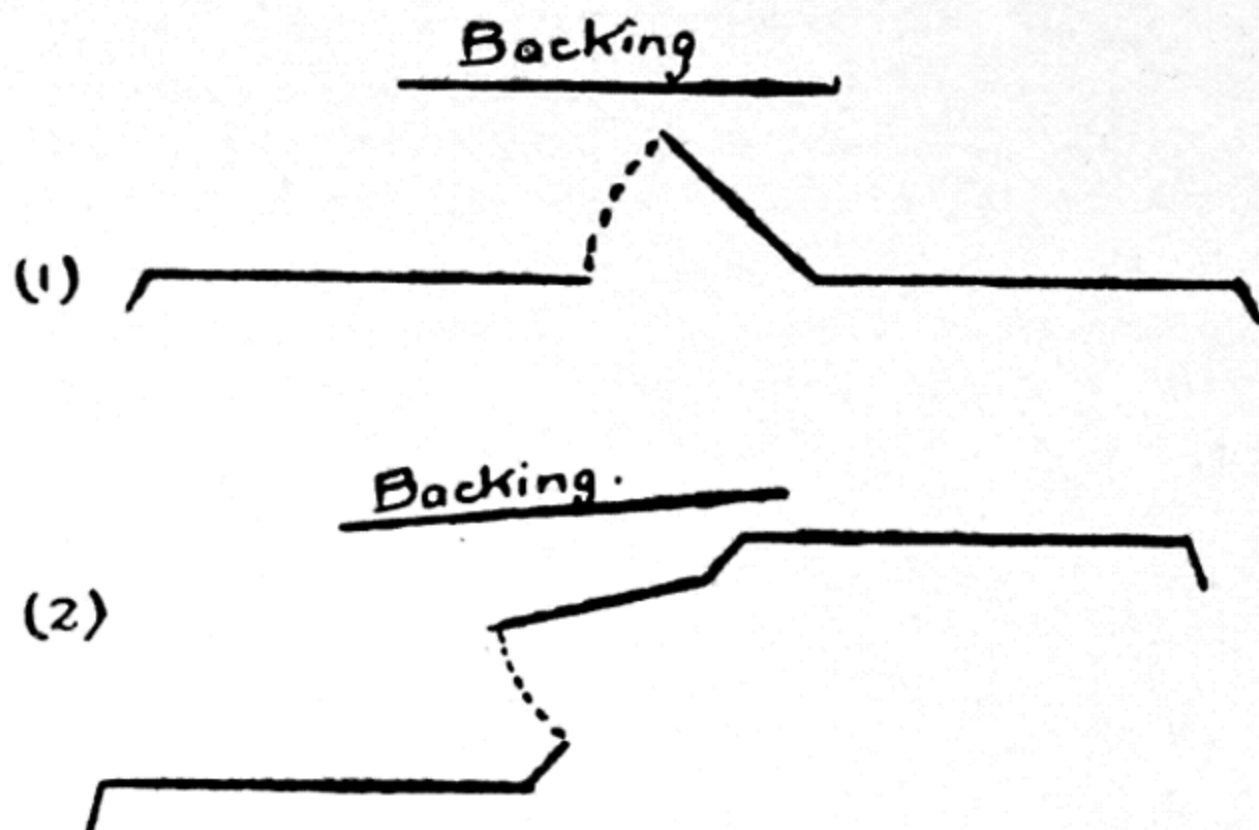


Fig. 4: Showing how an angled setting of a door can afford extra playing area.
 (1) Door set parallel.
 (2) Door set at angle.

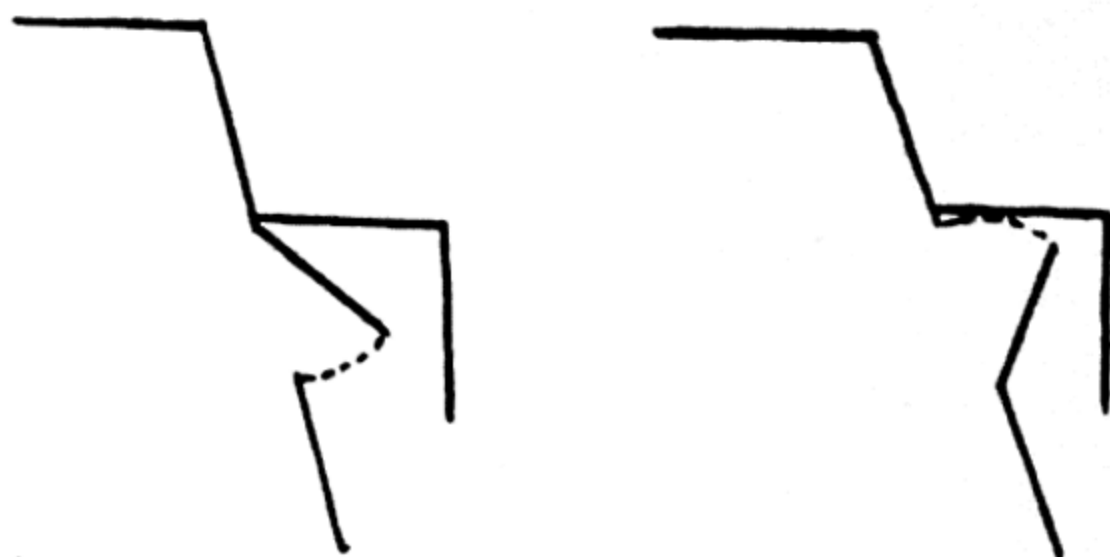
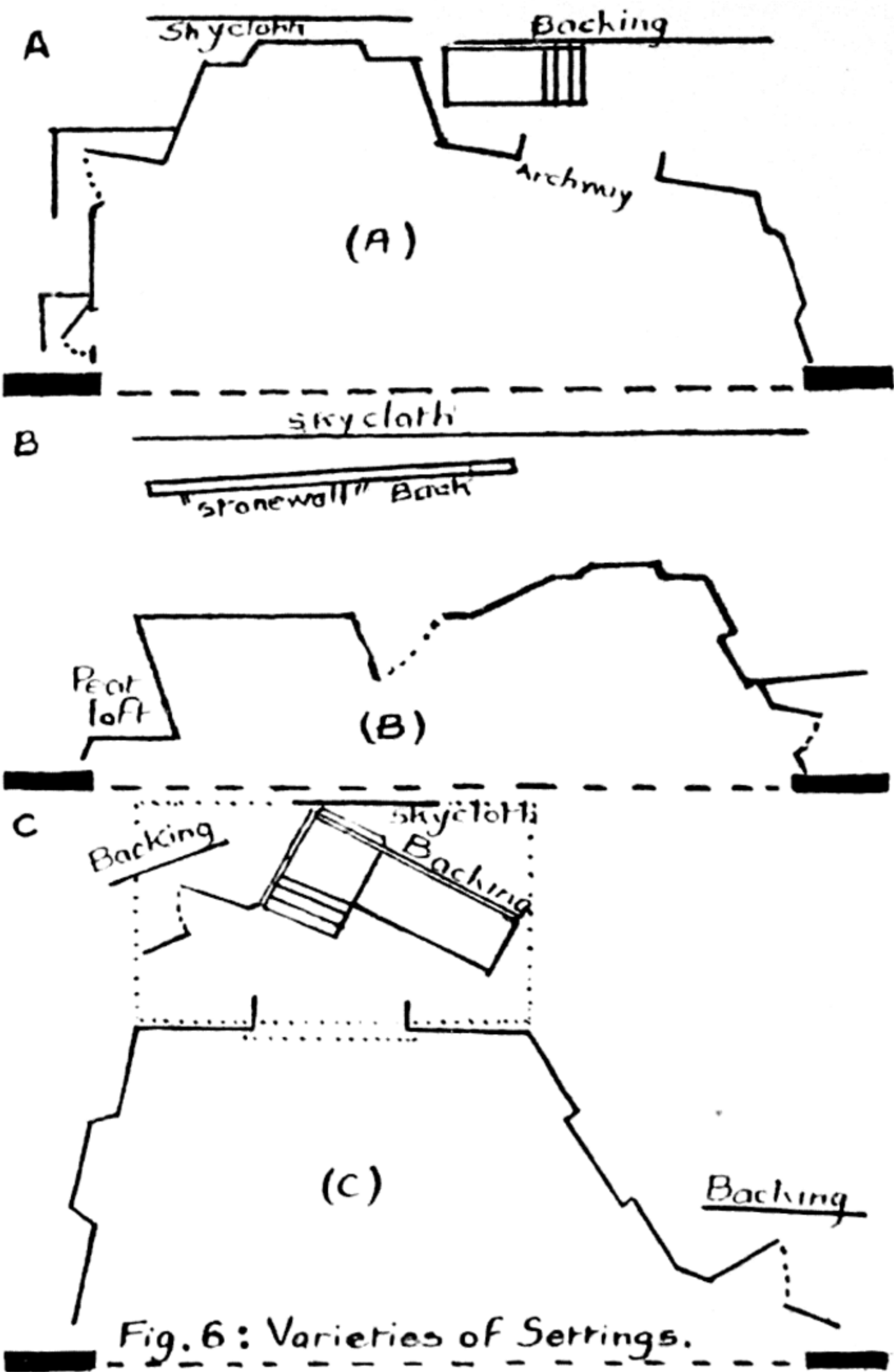


Fig. 5:
 Practical door, opening
 Down-stage.
 (Note easy access)

Impractical door
 opening Up-stage
 (difficult access).

grouping and "patterning" of the characters is the producer's job, but the S.M. may need to remind him of the use of rostra, i.e. platforms of various sizes. For example, double french windows can be recessed back from the wall of the set and raised one or two steps from floor level; if placed UC, the producer will have a fine central focusing point for important entrances. Almost any entrance can be treated similarly; the Greek or Roman setting can have its temple steps, the medieval play its heavy wooden staircase; the modern country house its terrace raised above the level of the lounge; the slum kitchen or sordid café can be set as a basement with steps leading into it from the outside. (See Fig. 26.) In fantasy, realism can be abandoned and decorative effect be the criterion. Stairs can give a variety of acting heights, but, when planning, the S.M. should know the height of his tallest actor who will use them so that he can make sure the character will be completely visible and not appear to be decapitated to the gallery or back rows of the audience. Complete staircases need seldom be shown. After two or three stairs a platform should be used to represent a landing, giving the impression that a character arriving there is about to ascend a further flight.

In Figure 6 we have shown, as specimens, three different designs, all of which were executed in the same basic fibre-boarded flats: (A) represents the lounge and living room in *You Can't Take it With You* (Kaufman). A cast of nineteen had to use this room; therefore as much acting space as possible was required. The two doors were essential, together with the curtained archway, with the stairs being visible behind. (B) represents the small Irish cottage of *Riders to the Sea* (Synge), important features of which were a peat loft DR and stable door, UC. The door had to be sufficiently down (forward) to allow a stretcher to come through it and the loft had to be reached by a small pair of steps. The acting area could be cut down as the cast was small. In (C) it was again possible to cut down on the acting area as the play, *The Heiress* (Goetz), called for little physical action. The diagram shows the front parlour and hallway of a large Victorian house. Both hall and



parlour were important, and the angle of the stairs allowed the players to avoid presenting their profiles when entering or leaving by them. The whole hallway and stairs were mounted on a 9-in. rostrum (shown by a dotted line in the figure) which descended by a 4½-in. step into the room. The archway was curtained and the stair window was set at the top of the flat, giving an illusion of height.

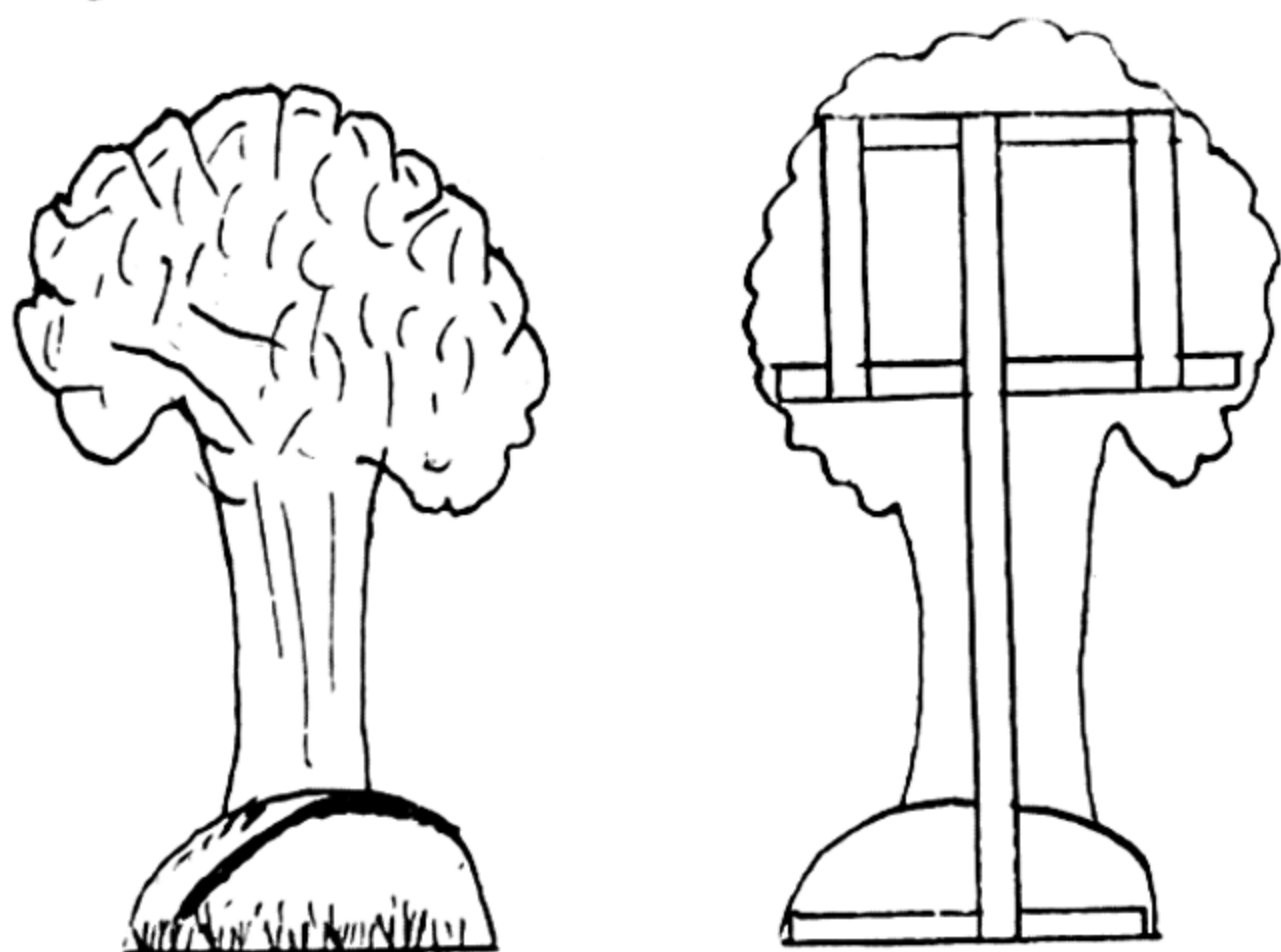


Fig. 7: Tree Cut-out. Front and Back:

Exterior Sets

These are usually represented by curtain backcloths and cut-outs. A cut-out is an outline (hedge, trees, end of a house, rock, etc.) made of hardboard or plywood cut out to the required shape and mounted on a frame. (Figure 7.) At best these are convincing symbols, and care should be taken to keep the play artistically homogeneous. For example, a convincing interior scene, complete with every realistic detail, should not be followed by symbolical trees and pretty, but artificial, shrubs in pots, etc. With a play that calls for several

very different scenes it is best to rely on suggestion throughout. (A good exercise in this technique is afforded by Dodie Smith's comedy, *Call it a Day*, which demands two bedrooms, a solicitor's office, a kitchen, a garden, and an artist's studio!)

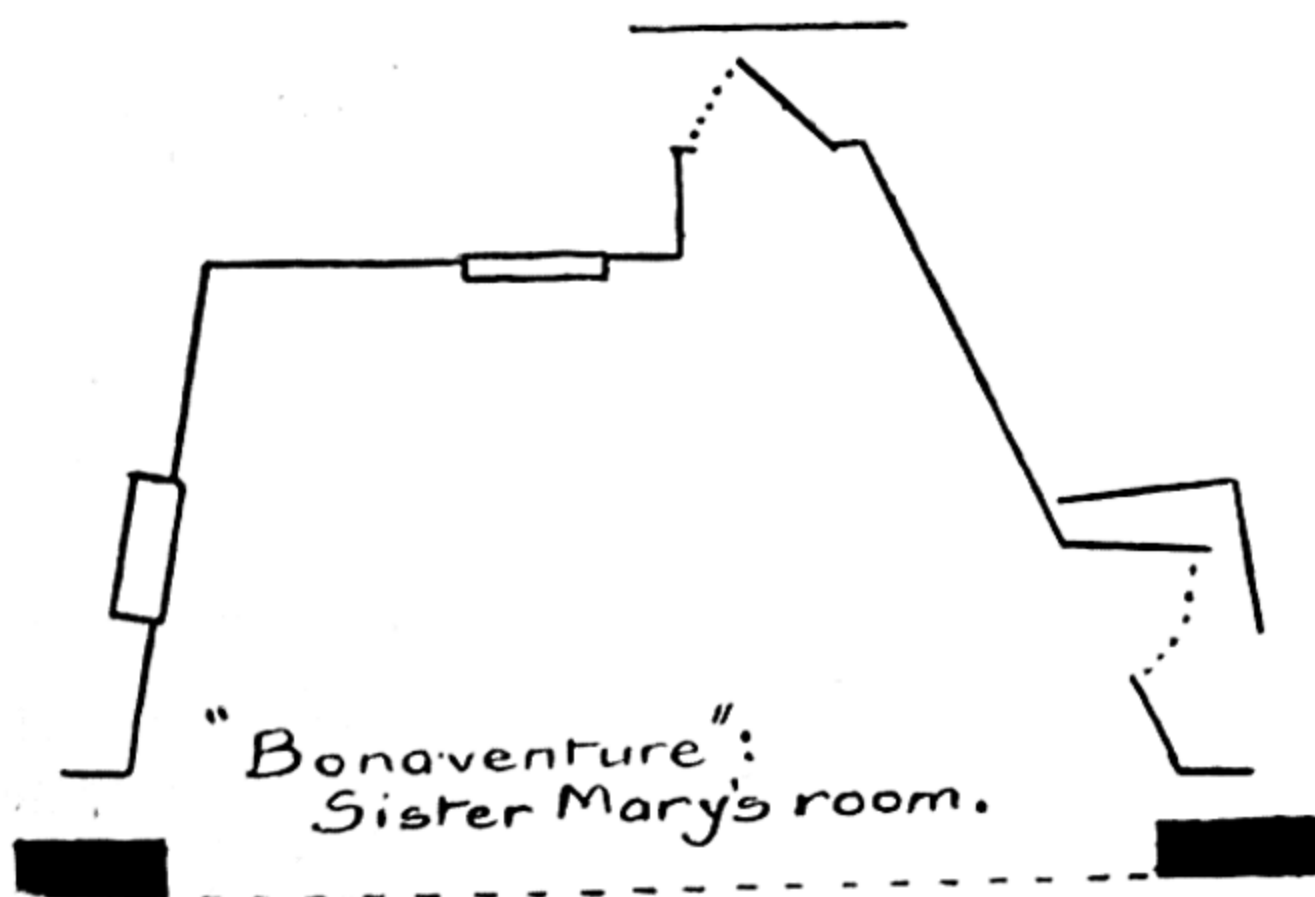
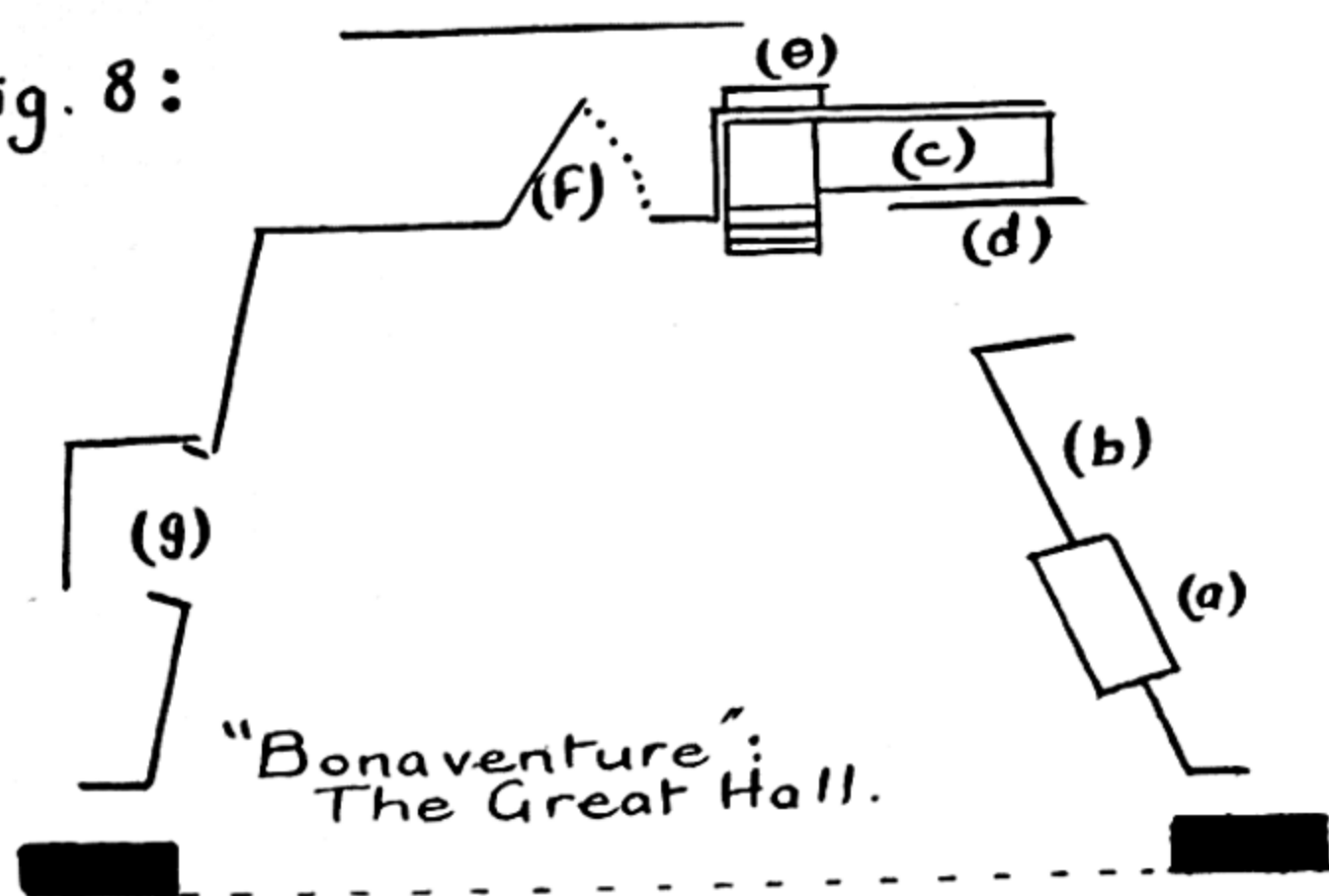
The painted representation of small properties such as books, vases, pictures, clock is not recommended. They do not look convincing in the average hall. The real things should be used.

Scene Changing with the "Box" Set

If the "box" set is used for a play with different scenes, and not the curtain set as suggested above, three main practical methods of scene-changing are open to the S.M. A small set can be erected inside a larger, and removed (perhaps later replaced) to reveal a second scene (it may be possible to use the flats of the outer set as backings for the inner one). Secondly, a "traverse" curtain can be used. This is a curtain that can be quickly drawn across the stage halving its depth and allowing a scene to proceed in front of it, while behind it the next scene is being prepared. Traverse curtains do not usually feature as part of the equipment of halls and schools. They can be hired.

Thirdly, changes can be made by altering window designs, or by converting a fireplace into a doorway and vice versa. As an example of this we have taken the play *Bonaventure* by Charlotte Hastings. This was performed by the authors' own dramatic group. It called for two main scenes: first, the Great Hall of a convent; secondly, the private room of one of the nursing sisters. The set (see Figure 8) was designed with both these scenes in mind and constructed with fibre-board (as described later in this chapter). These two scenes were represented by flats painted to represent stone slabs. In the Great Hall scene DL was a door flat (a) hung with a fireplace cowl and inserted with a "hearth stone" made of fibre-boarding. This formed the fireplace. Up-stage of this was a 1-foot flat (b) hinged to (a). Next to this was an exit backed by a movable flat (d). (c) represents stairs and rostrum leading behind

Fig. 8:



(*d*) into the wings. Behind the stairs (*c*) was a door flat (*e*) with a lattice window hung in the opening. UC was a door (*f*) opening out to a terrace and backed with a sky backcloth. RC was a "revealed" (see below) archway (*g*) apparently leading to the entrance hall. To change the scene from the Hall to the private room the stairs and rostrum (*c*) were "struck" (removed), (*d*) was swivelled to meet (*b*), which was swung round to follow the line of (*a*) and to meet the back wall flats. The window (*e*) was taken from the doorway and a backing put into place. The cawling from (*a*) was hung on the door (*f*) and a stove and back-cloth were inserted, leaving the doorway and backing at (*a*). A window seat was inserted in the arch (*g*) with the window frame from (*e*) hung on the back. The scene was thus completely transformed in a matter of minutes, and restored to its original form with equal speed.

Constructing the Set

When designing and making the set, the S.M. will be working with units of scenery known as "flats." He may have to work with existing scenery owned by his society, or he may have to construct his own. Flats are usually made 10 ft. or 12 ft. high with widths varying between 4 ft. and 1 ft. (Wide flats can always be reduced, for scenery effects, by overlapping or setting at an angle.) Few halls will take scenery of over 10 ft. high, but should an unusually lofty stage be met with, the S.M. can easily extend his flats in the manner explained below.

When a set is constructed, future productions should be borne in mind, hence the range of adaptable flats is suggested. These can be interchanged and re-decorated for future plays.

Traditionally, flats are made of canvas stretched over a wooden frame. They are in common use, and we, therefore, describe their construction while suggesting below cheaper substitutes.

To make a canvas flat 10 ft. by 4 ft., two lengths of timber of 10 ft. and four of 4 ft. are required. Four triangular plywood corner plates, about 6 ins. by 6 ins. by 9 ins., will be required for

strengthening. Timber should be $\frac{5}{8}$ – $\frac{7}{8}$ in. thick by 2–2½ ins. wide, and planed smooth. The frame of 10 ft. by 4 ft. is made, using the half-check or half-joint. (See Figure 9.) The remaining two short lengths are similarly jointed and fitted at a third from each end of the frame, the uprights being recessed to take them. All joints should be screwed, and not glued. Finally, the corner pieces are screwed in place, making sure that the angles are right angles. (See Figure 10.) Over this frame is stretched the canvas, which is nailed and, preferably, glued (on the sides, not the face, of the frame). Larger flats will need wider timber and more strutting.

Canvas, hessian, and well-seasoned timber necessary for the above are expensive. An alternative is to use a fibre insulating board, e.g. "Tirotex," which is about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. thick and made in sheets of 8 ft. by 4 ft. It is light in weight, with a surface, when primed, amenable to paint or distemper. Also it is not prone to flap as is canvas. It is framed on the lines of the canvas flats, but cheap, unplanned wood can be used. (See Figure 11.) The boards should be nailed to the wooden frame with large-headed clout nails.

Both types of flat will need tie-off lines and cleats for erection purposes, and ordinary sash or linen lines, obtainable from the ironmonger in 12-yard lengths, can be used. The cleats should be fixed some 2 ft. from the top of the flat at the back. Here holes, large enough to take the rope, are drilled diagonally from the inside edge of the left-hand rail through to the back of the frame. The line, which should be about 8 ft. long, is threaded through and knotted on the inside. With cheap or small timber a screw-eye can be used instead of the drilled hole. (See Figures 10 and 11.) Opposite, on the right-hand rail, a cleat is fixed. A cleat resembles the ordinary domestic "tie-off" plate used for clothes lines, etc. (See Figure 10.) Such cleats can be bought, or they can be made cheaply by recessing rough wood. (See Figure 11.) Finally, two tie-off round-headed screws are fixed 2 ft. from the bottom on both the upright rails. (See Figures 10 and 11.) The method of lashing is shown in Figure 12 and described in Chapter VII.

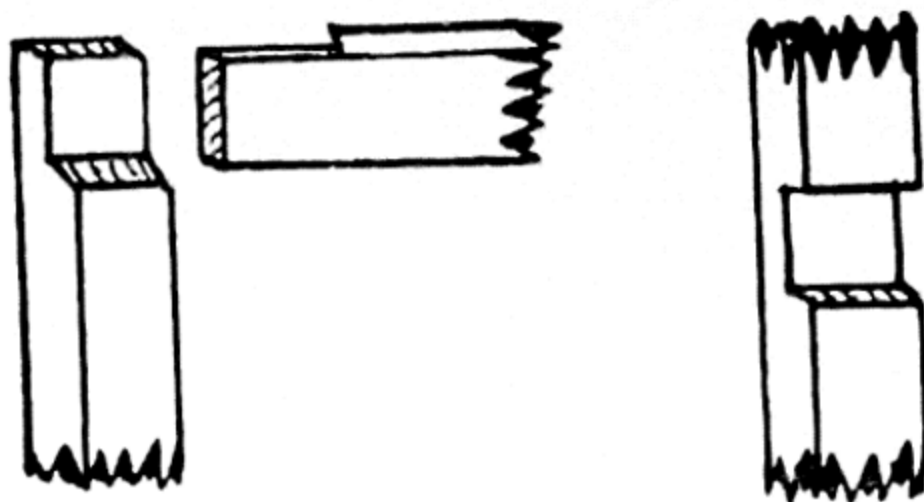


Fig. 9: Half-joint and Recessed Half-joint.

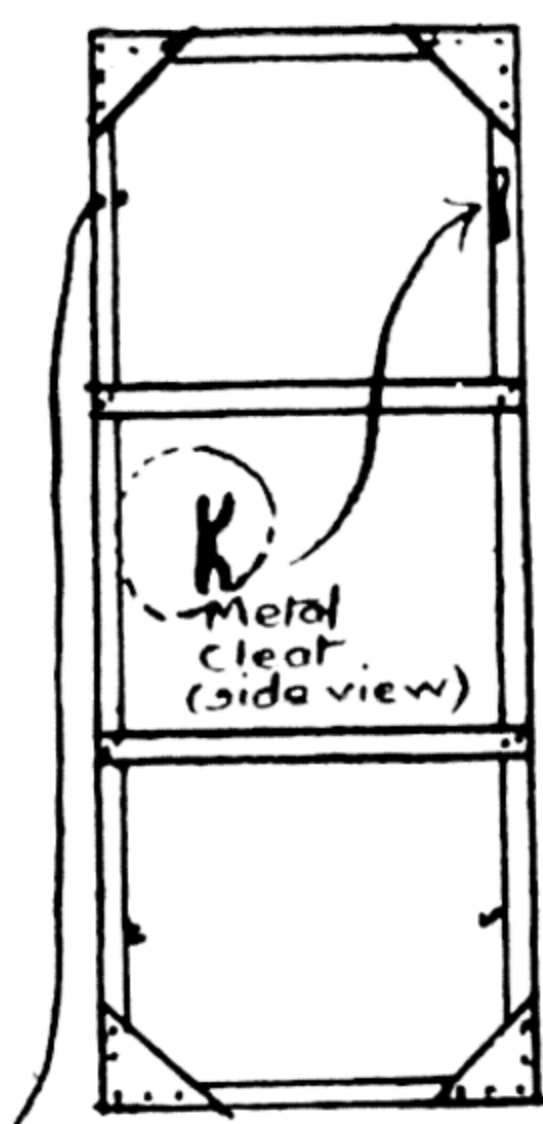


Fig. 10: Construction of Canvas Flat.

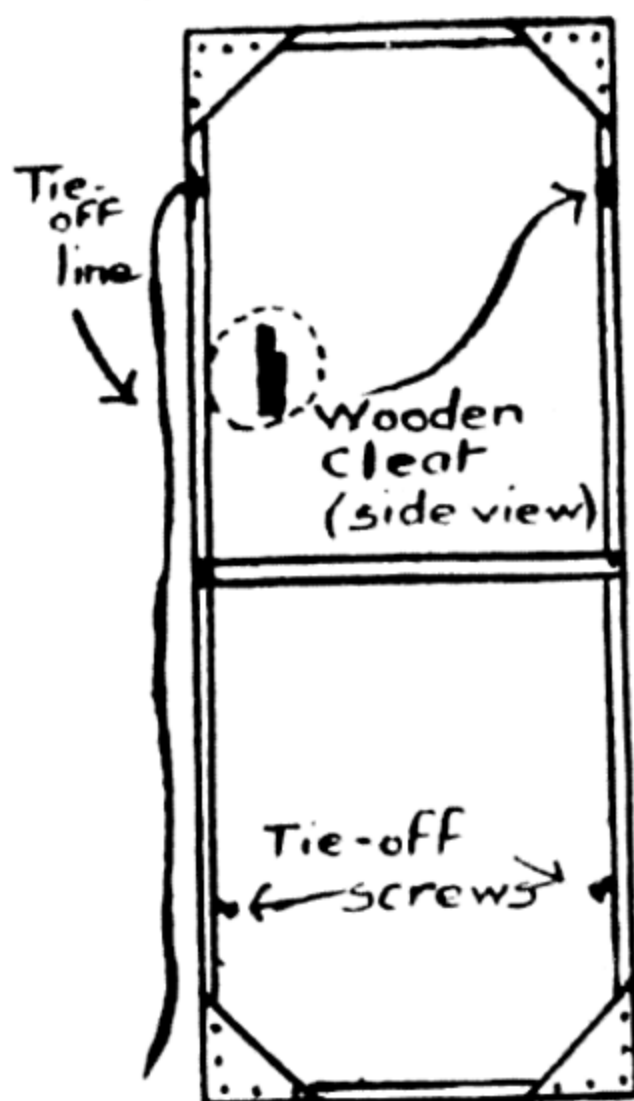


Fig. 11: Construction of Fibre-boarding Flat

To erect the flats (see Chapter VII) braces are also required. Extending braces are obtainable but are expensive; they are fitted at the top with "horns," which hook into screw-eyes inserted into the rails of the flat, the bottom of the brace being fitted with a metal plate for fixing to the floor of the stage. A cheap substitute can be made with a length of wood 1 in. by 1 in., 6 ft. long, using angle-plates top and bottom. If wide plates are available, two flats can be braced with one brace (see Figure 13) but the S.M. may find it easier to use ordinary shelf brackets opened out to the required angle.

If flats are to be stored in confined spaces, it may be desirable to make them to fold; a 10-ft. flat would thus be made of two sections (6 ft. and 4 ft.), hinged at the back and with two holes drilled near the hinges through the two end rails. Through these holes metal pegs or taper pins are inserted and these hold the two sections firmly in place. (See Figure 14.) The pins are best drilled and attached with string to the frame of the flat so that they are not easily lost. This folding method can be used if it is desired to extend existing flats say from 10 ft. to 12 ft. or 14 ft. high.

Doors, Windows, and Fireplaces

These should be built into complete flats with reveals, if desired. A reveal is the timber or boarding set at right angles to the flat (and hinged to facilitate storage) to give the impression of thickness of a door frame or wall. (See Figure 15.) Such flats are built as above. It should be remembered that the opening must be framed, using the recess and half-joint. For doors and french windows where the opening extends to the floor, sill irons are necessary. These are strips of rigid metal that can be covered with carpet, if desired, though being at floor level they are not conspicuous. Angled strips can be used, or one strip the width of the flat achieves the same purpose. (See Figure 16.) If larger timber, as in the rest of the flat, is used across the opening, the cast are likely to trip. Unless he is an expert the S.M. should not attempt to fit the doors exactly, but should make the door about an inch

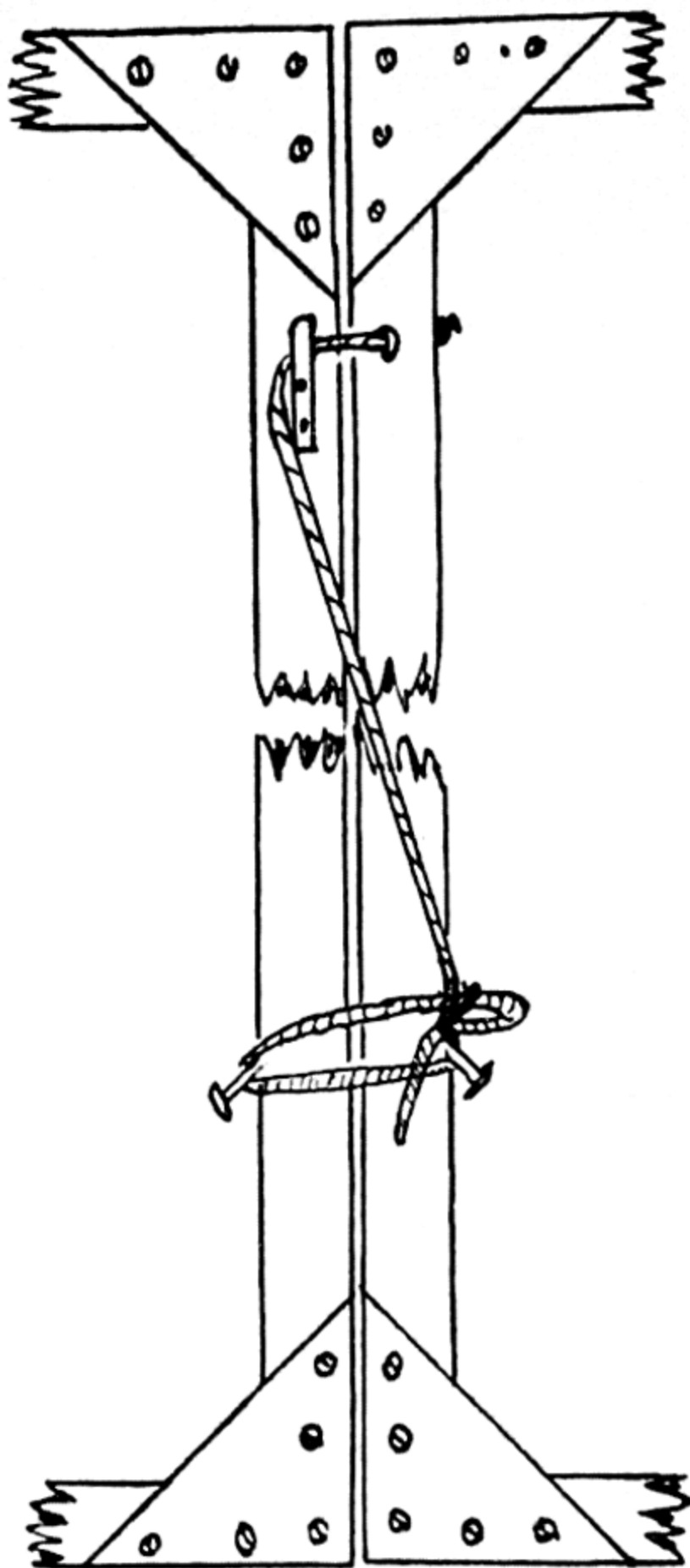


Fig.12 : Method of
Lashing Flats.

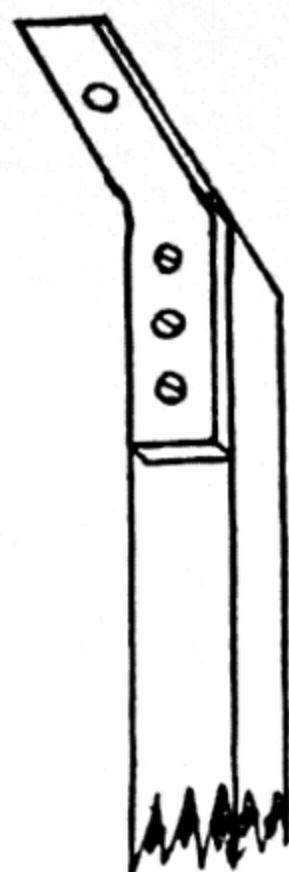


Fig.13 :
Brace, Top
and bottom.

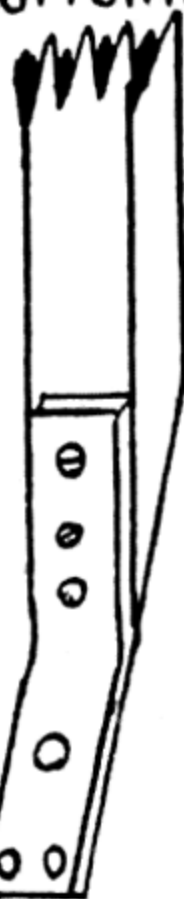


Fig. 15: Hinged reveal.

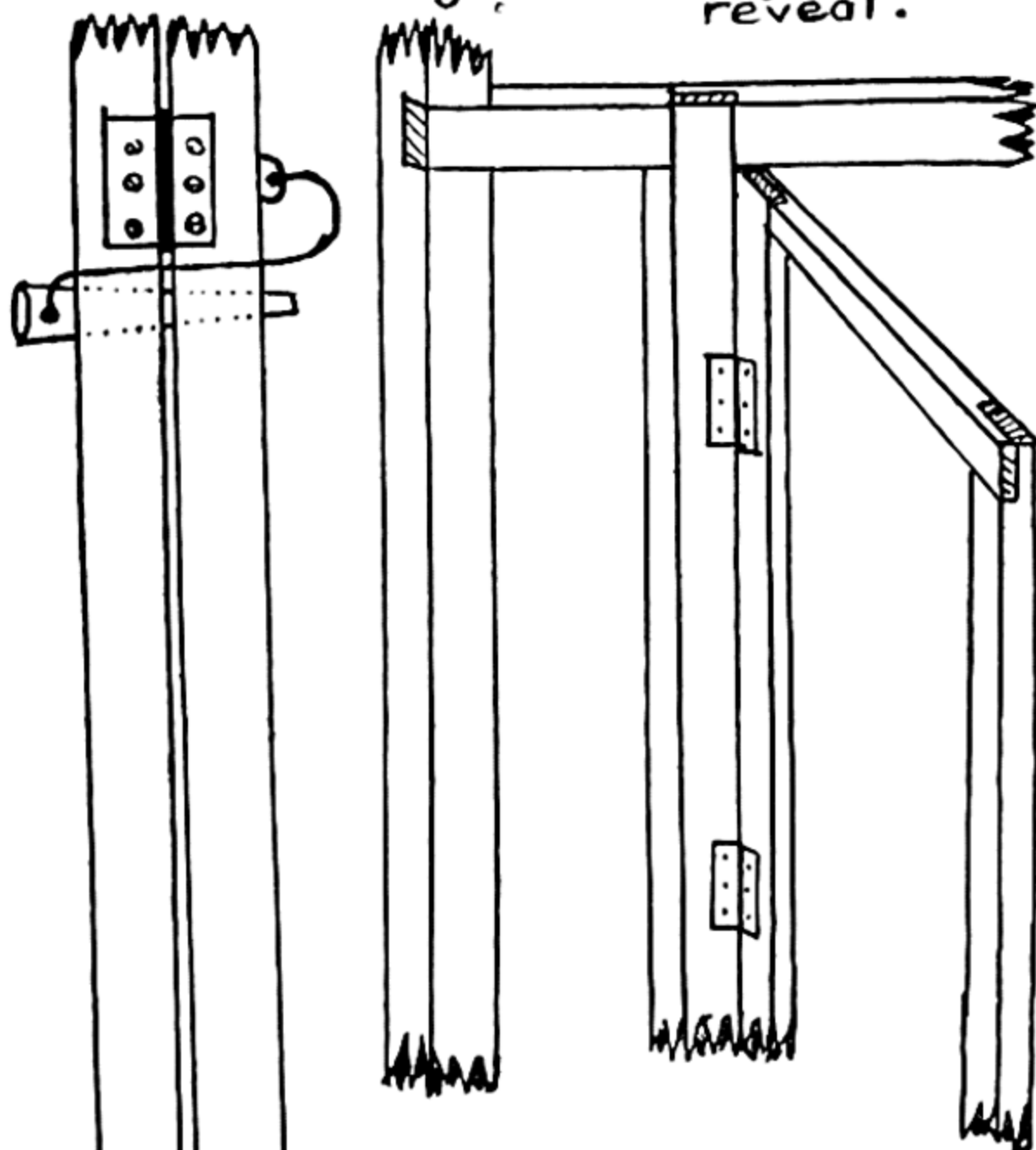


Fig. 16: Two types of Sill-iron.

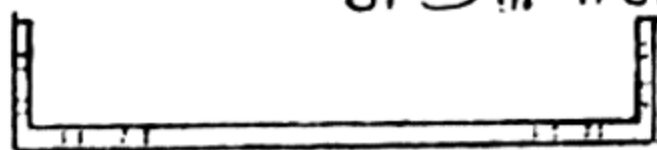
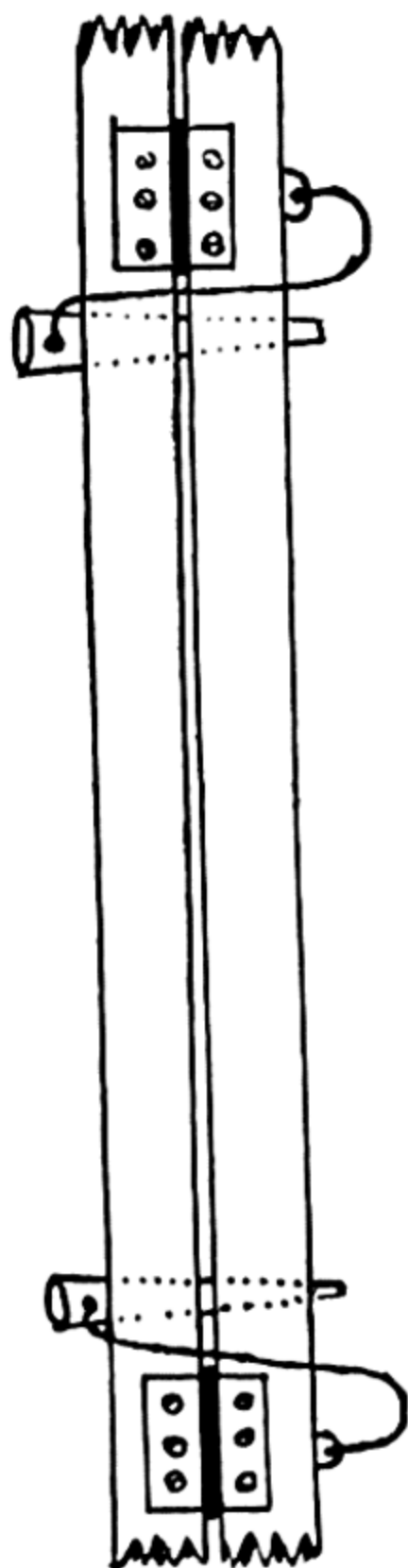


Fig. 14: Pinning a hinged Extension.



oversize so that the edge comes to rest against the door frame to give the impression of depth and to ensure that the door will not stick. The door should be fitted with a simple spring clip catch, easily adjustable. Ball-and-socket catches are expensive, make a noisy click not always appropriate to the play, and require a fitted door (which may foul under stage conditions). If the stage is raked, at least an inch space at the bottom of the door should be allowed or it will foul the floor as it opens into the wings.

With windows, hinged reveals can be used to give thickness. By means of detachable frames fitted with varying designs the appearance of a window can be easily changed (See Figure 17.) Practical windows should be avoided, but, if essential to the action, windows should be made to open easily with, say, $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. space in the middle (for lattice windows) and with a strip of card or ply tacked on one side to hide the visible gap. For practical sash windows, lines and weights are required; this is an expert carpenter's job, but it can be improvised if the action of the play can be limited to the raising and lowering of the window without the character releasing his hold. Glass is never used in windows. It is heavy and dangerous. Where leaded panes have to be suggested, black tape can be used to represent diamond-pane windows, etc. Opaque glass can be suggested by draughtsman's linen paper, or even by tracing paper if permanence is not essential, and this can be painted on to represent stained glass. Net curtains often feature in modern houses, and if these can be used, a window is more convincing, and its backing need not be so carefully painted (unless the window has to be opened). Also, any effects such as lightning, snow, or rain, seen through the blur of net, will be more convincing.

Fireplaces do not usually present difficulty. The opening must be revealed and backed, using black curtaining or a black-painted board. The opening does not need a sill iron, as a fender or curb will hide the bottom rail. The hearthstone is important as the floor of the room, or carpet, must not appear to go up to the grate itself; it can be made of an oblong sheet

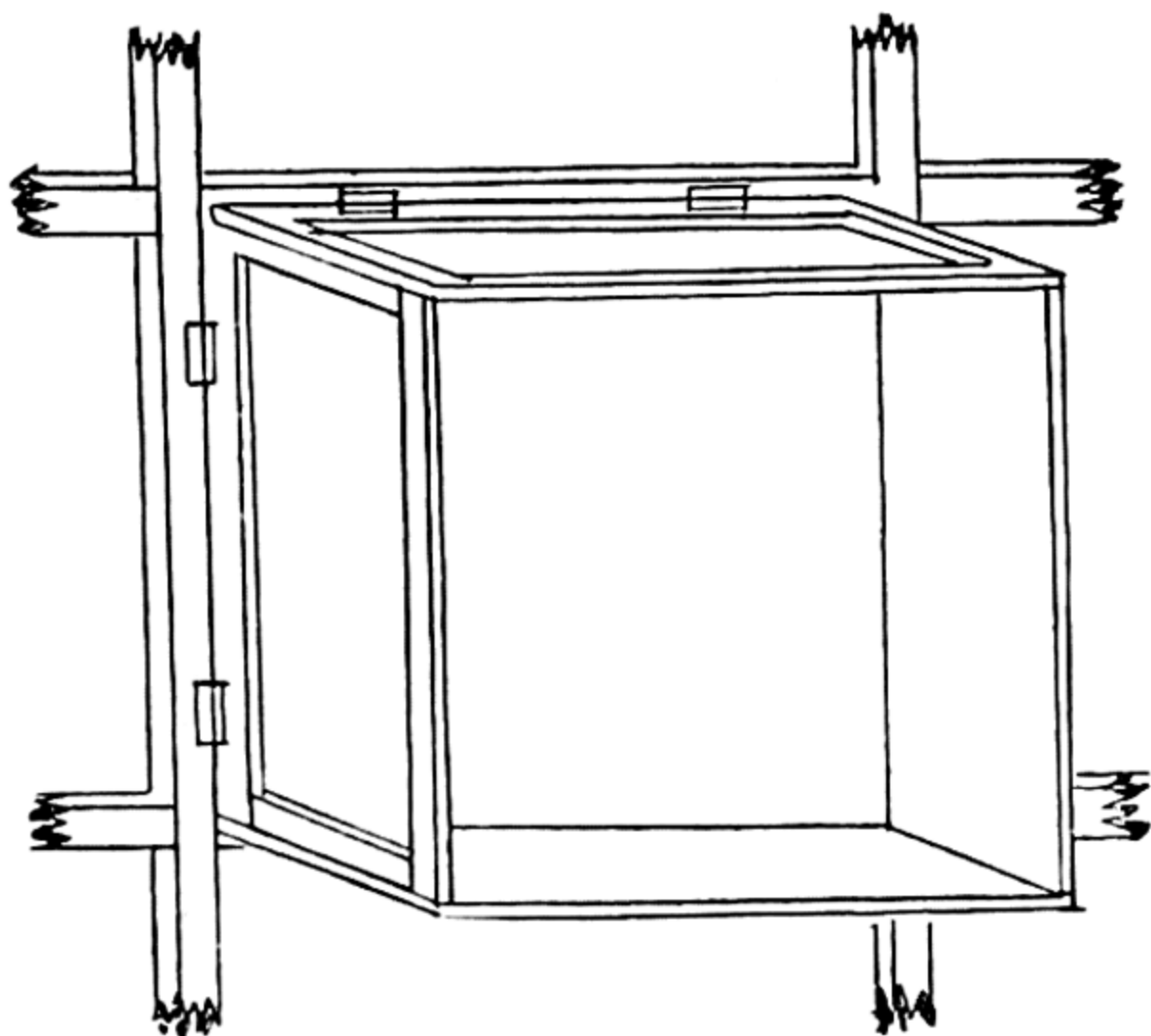
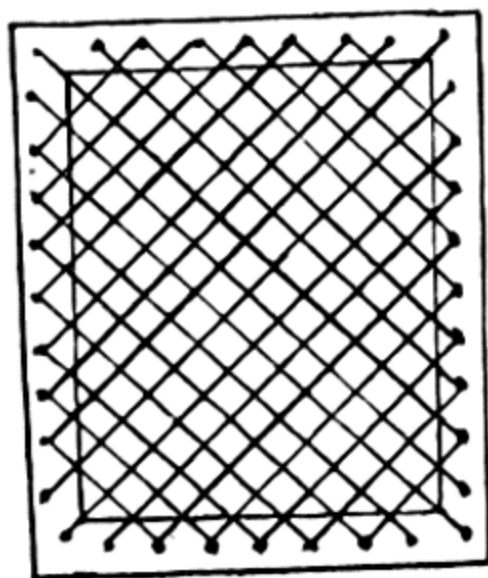
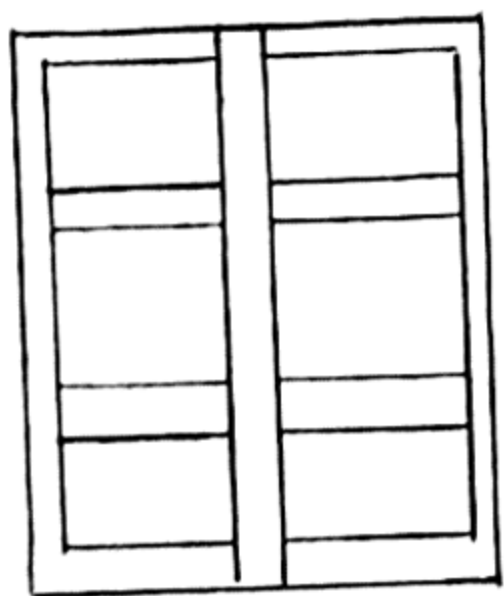


Fig.17: Revealed Window Opening.



Two types of Frames which could be fitted to the above.

of fibre-boarding. The mantel-shelf is fitted with angle brackets, and ornamented surrounds can be painted or modelled in relief by means of papier mâché (see Chapter IV). The mantel-piece will not take heavy objects unless it is heavily built and bracketed. Older-type surrounds in the home are constantly giving way to modern fireplaces, and it is sometimes possible to obtain a complete surround that has thus been replaced. Such an acquisition has everything to commend it, apart, perhaps, from its weight. Fenders or curbs can usually be borrowed; a fender can easily be made from plywood, moulding, and broomsticks, and painted. The actual effect of a live fire is dealt with in Chapter V.

Stairs and Rostra

A complete unit of stairs with landing (rostrum) can be adapted to suit almost any play. Three or four steps are adequate for most sets. They must not be too large. The framework should be of 2 in. by 2 in. timber, using the half-joint principle. The treads should be covered with $\frac{5}{8}$ -in. boarding of the type used for packing cases. The risers (upright faces) can be filled in with any material. (See Figure 18.) The rostrum can be in the form of a table with short legs, but it must be strong enough to hold about five people. Ex-Government surplus stock shelter beds, minus the wire and covered with rough packing-case timber, make excellent rostra of the right length, i.e. about 6 ft. (See Figure 19.) Stair banisters can be cut out of boarding or 1-in. square timber (depending on whether the audience will see more than the outline).

The above jobs should be possible with a few basic tools, (saw, plane, screwdriver, hammer, chisel, rule, and square) with a small garage or garden shed as a workshop. A nest of saws is an asset. This consists of a saw handle with three different-sized blades, which can cut curves and corners (and which can be obtained at Woolworth's Stores). A tommy-bar and punch may be required when erecting the set. (See Figure 20 and Chapter VII.)

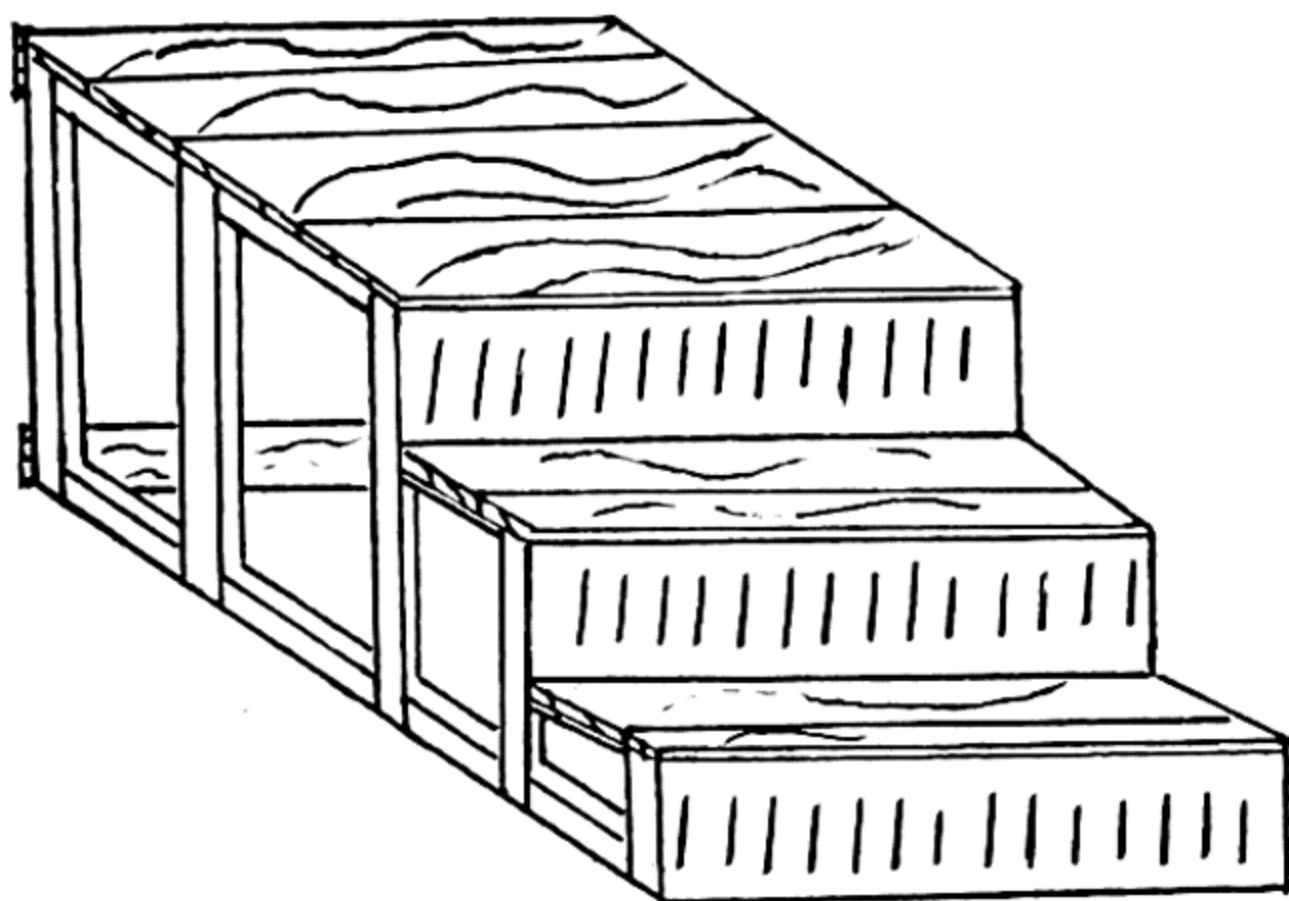


Fig. 18: Stairs made from packing cases using frame of 2"x2" timber and Half-joints.

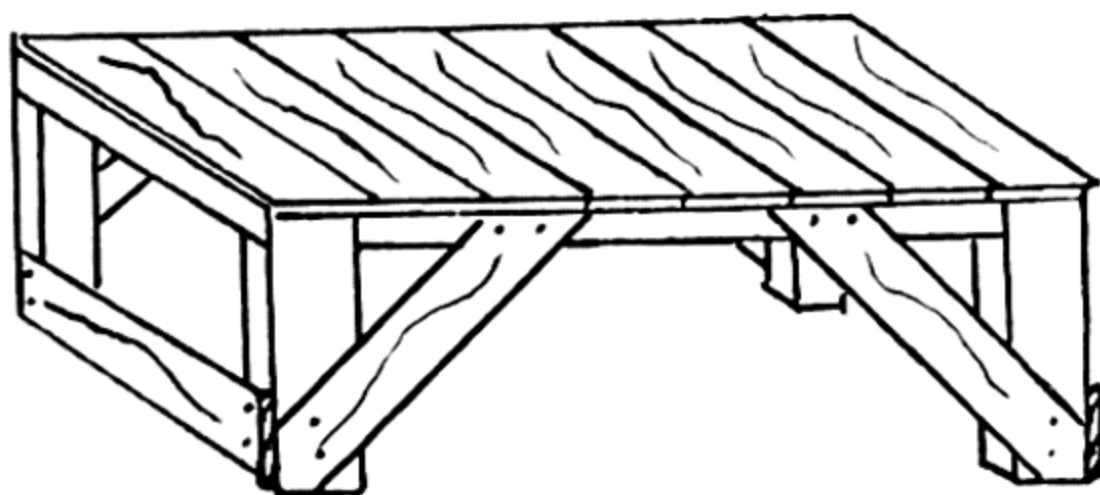


Fig. 19: Rostrum made from ex-w. D. bed and packing case timber.

Painting

Scene painting is simply an exaggerated form of drawing and colouring where boldness of execution is more important than detail. The natural tendency, when working at close quarters, is to give undue finish to the work that will be wasted under stage lighting. On the other hand, undue exaggeration, such as is met with in professional scene painting, is to be

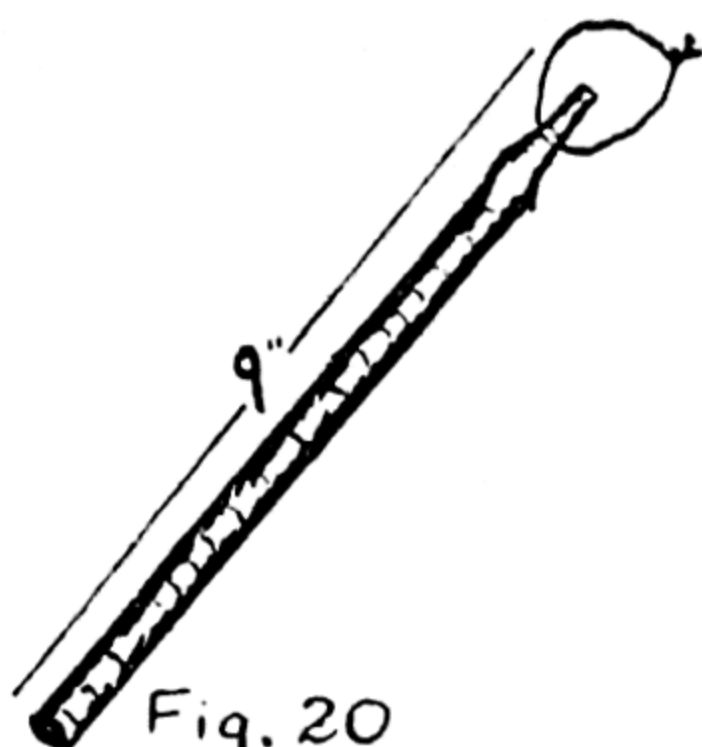
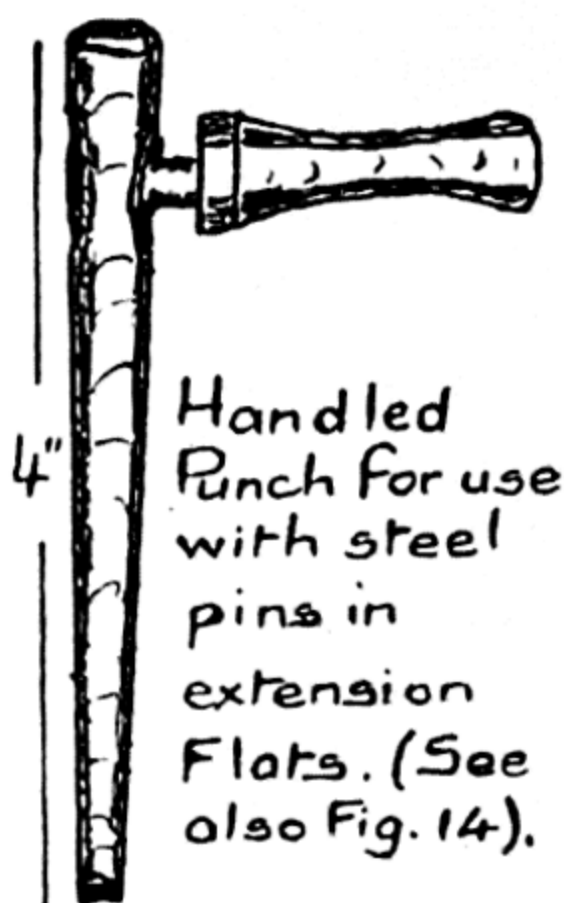


Fig. 20
Tommy-bar for use
with screw-eyes



Handled
Punch for use
with steel
pins in
extension
Flats. (See
also Fig. 14).

avoided, for the powerful lighting and long-distance vision that call for this technique will not be found in the amateur theatre. It is advisable to test colours by painting a piece of canvas or fibre-boarding and allowing the paint to dry; colours always dry lighter. The effect of coloured stage lights on a scene is dealt with in Stage Lighting in this Series, but the S.M. can keep a check on his effects by throwing various colours on his work (this can be done by shining a high-powered electric lead light through coloured gelatine). Colour effects should never be judged by daylight.

Before painting, the S.M. should prime his flats with glue size, which should be left to dry. If not too expensive, stage

water-colour paints should be used; distemper, mixed with size, however, is satisfactory, and will not rub off, but the range of colours is not wide. Colour mixing should be experimented with: for example, red and blue in paint produce purple, but in distemper a dove grey will be the result. Glossy paints should not be used, as glaze, under stage lighting, destroys the appearance of colour.

Modern wallpaper effects can be obtained by "stippling"; the flat is painted with a basic colour, then dabbed over with a sponge dipped in another colour, the mixture of which should be fairly thick to avoid running. Two or more colours can be used in this way. For more definite patterns stencils cut from card or gelatine should be used. It is convenient to lay the flat face-upwards on the floor and to work with a short-bristled brush. To get the effect of a slightly dirty, well-lived in room a colour slightly darker than the basic colour of the wall should be stippled. Over a fireplace the dirt will be at the top of the wall, but near the doors, or where chair-backs rub, there will be grime at shoulder height. The soiled area near the handle on a light-coloured door should not be overlooked in this type of room. When panels, ledges, or mouldings are being painted on doors or flats the shadows should be away from the apparent source of light (window, electric light, etc.).

Doors and woodwork can be painted to simulate a stained and polished finish with the grain showing through. The surface should be given a coat of terra-cotta distemper fairly thick, and allowed to dry. Ordinary water stain should then be applied, and, when this is still wet, drawn up and down (if this is to be the direction of the grain) with a graining comb and allowed to dry. Some of the lines can be picked out in black with a thin lining brush, if desired. The effect will be polished and grained wood which will not, however, reflect light (which must be avoided). Water stain can be obtained in crystal form, known as Vandyke Crystals, from an iron-monger and should be watered down to the required colour. Graining combs made of rubber can be bought. An ordinary

hair comb cut to about half its width with some of the teeth removed will give an uneven graining, but it needs a light touch. Stiff card, suitably notched, will also serve for a short time, but it quickly becomes soggy.

A paint-spraying gun will simplify large-scale painting, but it is expensive. A small type, used with a domestic vacuum cleaner, is relatively cheap, but the container requires constant re-filling; it can be used for shading or "dirtying down" effects.

Having built and decorated his set, the S.M. must fireproof it. There are several formulae laid down. A good working preparation is: phosphate of ammonia, 1 lb.; sal ammoniac, 2 lb.; water, $1\frac{1}{2}$ gallons. The proofing should be done only a short time before the production. The solution can be applied with a brush, or sprayed on to the backs of the flats, care being taken that the liquid does not reach the colours on the front of the flat.

If the S.M. is in any doubt about fire precautions generally, it is best to contact the local fire prevention officer.

The large scenic back-cloth is not likely to feature in the average amateur production, but the S.M. may be called on to produce one for purposes of a pantomime or children's play. Also some of the larger backings of landscapes, etc., seen through up-stage windows may be regarded as miniature scenic back-cloths. It will usually be necessary to paint a large canvas at the hall itself, as this cannot be done satisfactorily in the garage or small studio. If the cloth is suspended in position against the back of the stage, the S.M. can work direct; otherwise it becomes necessary to lay the cloth on the floor and to walk on it, taking care not to step on any part that is wet.

Flats, butted together edge to edge, can be used to make one large scene for these purposes. They can be painted separately and assembled on the stage, but it is difficult to disguise the joins.

Whichever method is used, the S.M. is likely to be working from a small picture or design. To transfer this to the large area the picture is squared off. The canvas or assembled flats

are similarly treated, using a convenient scale. For short lines a straight-edge and charcoal can be used. For long lines a "snap line" is quicker. This consists of a length of string rubbed with charcoal. It is fastened at one end of the area, drawn taut over the proposed line, and plucked. As it strikes the surface a black line results. The artist then draws his scene in charcoal and follows his "squared-off" sketch. If this preliminary sketch is drawn competently, the scene-painter can reproduce the effect on a large scale, even though he may have no drawing skill.

Curtain Sets

Amateurs sometimes "work in curtains," i.e. use curtains instead of scenery flats, though the use of fireplace flats, etc., can be incorporated. This is a feature of drama festivals and is dealt with in Chapter VIII. Should the S.M. be responsible for the initial installation of this type of curtain for his society, he should consider Bolton sheeting of a neutral shade. Size, method of hanging, etc., will depend upon the hall to be used. The S.M. may be responsible also for the curtain fittings, in which case the domestic type of curtain runner is satisfactory, as it can be shaped easily to form the required surround. The fixing of curtain runners is usually done by the firm supplying the materials. It is specialized work, but the S.M. may be called in to advise on the layout. This should be carefully considered, as, unlike flats, the acting area and basic shape of the set will be permanent when the fittings are in place. Curtains should be in several separate sections to allow for all possible variations of exits, entrances, and the insertion of flats, etc. Usually such curtains are fireproofed by the manufacturers.

Figure 21 shows three possible lay-outs, using curtains. (A) is a common design, but all exits in the back drapes have to be backed. Furniture placed at the sides of this type of setting should follow the line of the splay. Figure (B) shows another design, usually met with at festivals. As in the other plans in this figure, the curtains are shown as a continuous line,

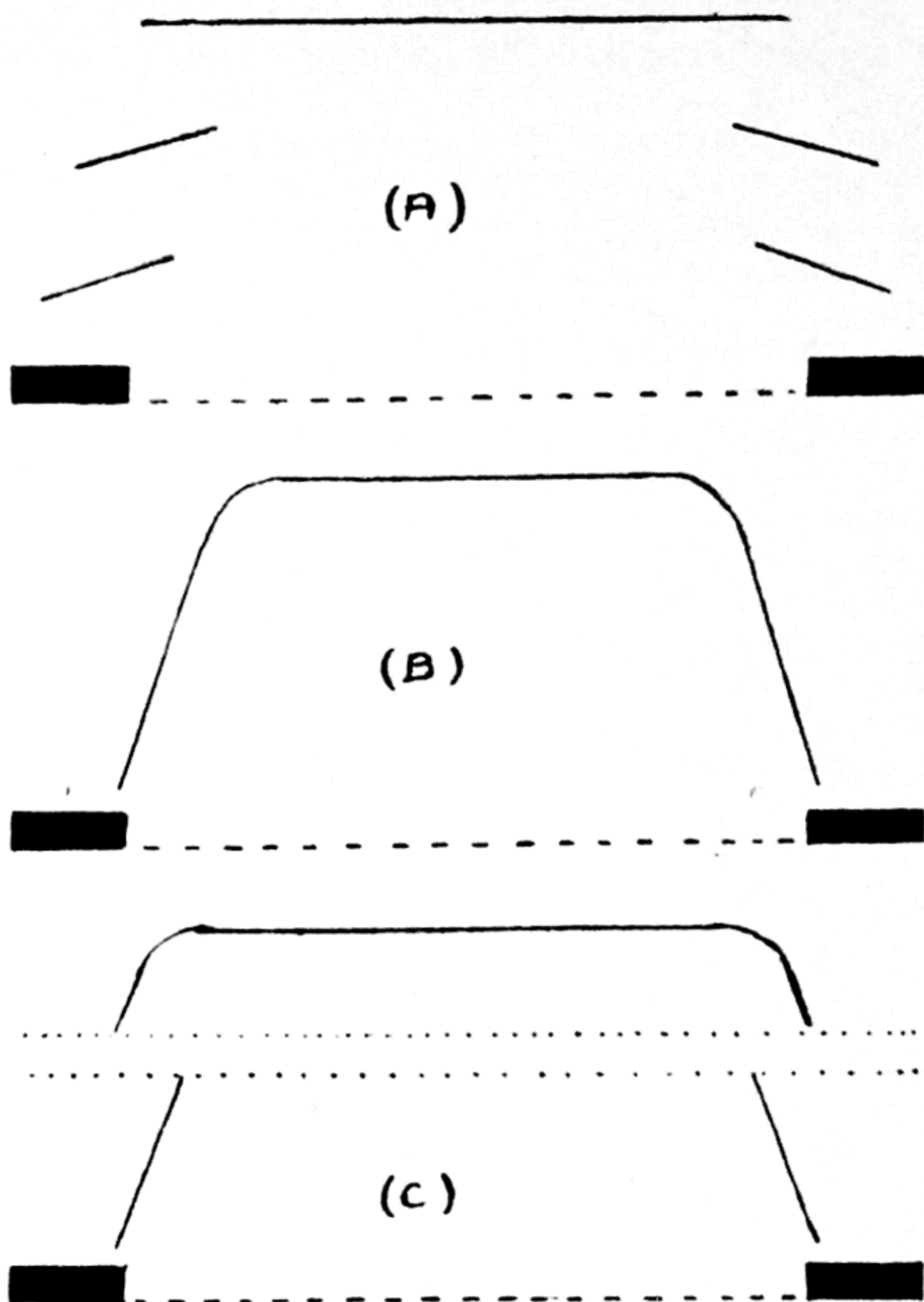


Fig. 21: The curtain set; Three arrangements.
(initial installation).

but they are made up of narrower sections, and here all access "gaps," back or side, will need to be backed. Figure (c) demonstrates how special features found in various halls may be used. The double dotted line represents a beam, about 18 ins. in depth, which prevented the curtain runner from forming a continuous line. The stage formed part of a new school, and it was not desirable to disfigure the ceiling with a heavy wooden frame lowered to the height of the beam. The line of the curtain rail was, therefore, broken as shown. This enabled it to be battened against the ceiling, and also gave two access gaps that could be used without backing.

The Model

A model of the stage and set is not only interesting in itself, but also of help to the producer and cast who do not always find it easy to visualize the scene as it will appear finally. Some S.Ms. prefer to make a model first and to use it as a basis for their design; others work out their set on paper and construct a model, if at all, later. Also some producers like to demonstrate their production moves on a model, using counters to represent the characters.

Cartridge paper or ordinary "shoe-box" cardboard can be used. A base will be required (wood, thick card, or an inverted cardboard lid) which need not show the height of the stage from floor level, unless desired. On this base should be indicated the ground plan, which can be reproduced by using carbon paper face down, the plan already made by the S.M. in his stage survey being used, and the design being traced through. Cardboard rectangles for flats can then be made to represent the scene with whatever accuracy or detail the S.M. chooses. Furniture and stage properties need be shown in outline only, for unless the model is on a large scale the making of miniature tables and chairs, etc., is a finicky business.

CHAPTER IV

FURNITURE AND PROPERTIES

THE type of furniture used in the play depends largely upon the play itself and also upon the producer, who should not be biased appreciably by the designer. For most modern settings, it is usually more convenient to borrow, either from a local furniture dealer or from members of the society and their friends. A free advertisement in the programme often satisfies the lending firm; otherwise the society may find that hiring is rather expensive. The advantage of personal loan is that members of the cast can often make themselves familiar with the furniture well before the performance; they may even be able to rehearse with it. Also, as most amateurs are working people, it is easier to arrange collection, etc., out of working hours.

The size of furniture should be considered carefully; it is better to err on the small side rather than on the large, thus avoiding filling up too much valuable acting space.

The modern scene often features the hard-worked settee and easy chairs. The very deep type may give actresses trouble with their skirts. They may be difficult to rise from; and, usually, they are cumbersome to move about. Therefore, get small, light-weight suites, if possible. Avoid placing a settee full-on to the audience in which position it may give the appearance of a posed photograph when it seats more than two characters. Provided the cast have good carrying voices, it is possible to have the settee backing the audience and facing the fireplace, as most settees do, instead of being isolated in the centre of a room and facing the imaginary "fourth wall." If drawers in sideboards, etc., are to be used, make sure that they operate easily and do not stick (wax polish or soap rubbed on

the points of friction helps). Highly-polished furniture is best avoided.

When period furniture has to be used, the S.M. should acquaint himself with the general style that is appropriate to the era. If necessary, reference books should be consulted. As with stage design, absolute accuracy is not necessary, but the style should suggest the atmosphere of the period. All types of period furniture can be hired. Some styles can easily be made, using modern pieces as a basis and building up with fibre-boarding, ply, or papier mâché. Packing cases make a good basis for benches and couches, particularly those of the simple classical type. (See Figure 25, Chapter 8.) The audience has only a limited view of stage furniture—unless it is moved during or between scenes—and time need not be spent on refinements that won't be seen. Curtains and drapes can be used to disguise furniture; a large plush table-cloth, for example, can completely hide a modern table and make it correct for many different periods; the old-fashioned couch can be renovated with drapings carefully and artistically arranged; a piano stool similarly treated can be useful. Elegant furniture of the Restoration period is not easily home-made; it is safer to borrow or to hire it. New, reproduction furniture is not recommended as it usually has a high polish. The glass in china cabinets, etc., can be troublesome because of its high reflecting properties, but it can be treated satisfactorily. (See below.)

The society and the S.M. have a duty towards members and friends who lend furniture for use on the stage. Stages are often dirty, cramped places, and actors and the stage staff, under the stress of the production, may not use these properties with desirable care. The S.M. should warn his cast about possible damage, and keep a watchful eye on the property under his control.

A carpet often improves the appearance of a set and ensures quiet movement. It may even be essential. If used, it should, if possible, cover the whole acting area. Any curling edges should be lightly tacked down to avoid accidents. Small rugs

on the stage can prove dangerous unless they are flat. If used, they should be placed in appropriate places, i.e. in front of the fireplace, at the foot of stairs, etc., and not merely used to fill up floor space. Large canvas floor coverings, known as "treads," are used in the professional theatre. Their purchase can be a good investment for a society with a hall of its own. The treads can be painted to represent lino, or carpeting, and are valuable in deadening the noise of feet. Failing a tread or carpet, the cast should be asked to wear soft shoes, where appropriate, as the clattering of hard footwear is distracting to an audience and destroys illusion.

Properties and Stage Dressings

Most modern, and many period, properties are easily borrowed. Many useful objects are to be found in people's attics and "boxrooms." Antique and junk shops are other sources of supply, but the S.M. will be wise not to burden himself with too much material that needs storing space. There are limits to the number of occasions on which properties can be used, for the society's followers will begin to recognize them! Antique, or unusual, properties, such as swords, goblets, sceptres, rings, fans, some ornaments, etc., can be hired from firms that specialize in these, but they can often be home-made. (See below.)

Pictures should have their glass removed and mirrors should be angled to avoid annoying the audience with reflections. In all properties and furniture that contain glass it is safer, however, to dull the surface by pasting it over with a sheet of thin grease-proof paper, or by rubbing it over with soap or whiting—though here the effect may be streaky.

Clocks

If clearly discernible, and an essential property, a clock must show time that is appropriate to the action of the play. It is possible to keep the clock "synchronized" with stage-time by extending the mechanism that operates the hands by introducing a shaft through the back of the clock, to be operated by

a member of the stage-staff using a replica of the dial. This needs careful rehearsal and experiment. If the clock merely "dresses" the stage, its face should be kept angled away from the audience, or be stopped; the striking mechanism should certainly be silenced.

Ornaments

These should be used sparingly, unless an overcrowded Victorian effect is required. If not moved during the play, they should be wired to the mantel-piece with thin copper wire and drawing pins. Those that have to stand on tables, sideboards, etc., can be weighted with sand if there is any danger of their being knocked over. With vases, water is inadvisable and not usually necessary as real flowers should be avoided. Care should be taken to change flowers if the passing of time or season between scenes warrants it. Sometimes a bar or a shop scene has piles of dummy cartons stacked in pyramid form. Disused packets can be built up into stable units convenient for quick setting, and secured with "Cellotape." (See Fig. 26.)

Weapons

However realistic, real swords, even when blunt, are best left alone by amateurs, unless the weapon remains in its scabbard throughout the play. A sword should be worn early in rehearsals to avoid the possibility of a disastrous trip-up on the night. Shields can be made from ply or card, and decorated, if necessary, with papier mâché. Old-type guns made of wood and painted black can be convincing, but with pistols that have to be fired on-stage real weapons are necessary. The user of a gun does not require a fire-arms certificate, but the owner does, and if the society buys its own the local police station should be asked about the certificate. The noise of gunfire is dealt with in Chapter V.

Money

Stage money is obtainable, but usually notes and actual

coins can be used, unless the character has to handle very large quantities. Even here a large wad of paper money can be suggested by scrap paper cut to size and banded together to show real notes top and bottom.

Documents, etc.

Modern documents, i.e. telegrams, can be represented by the real thing. Envelopes that have to be opened on-stage should not be firmly sealed, only the tip of the flap should be fastened so that a player can open the envelope cleanly. Ancient documents and parchment can be suggested by painting thick white paper the correct shade (using clear varnish or Vandyke Crystals) or by using brown paper. Plasticine is useful for seals. Most S.M.s like to write the actual words on documents, letters, etc., but the actor should not rely on reading these. For periods before the Victorian age neither blotting paper nor steel-pointed pens should be used. Quills can be merely large feathers. Real ink is best kept off the stage.

Smoking

Fire precautions are necessary if smoking has to take place. Cigars should be cut. Matchboxes should have a couple of matches sticking out to avoid the player having to fumble; cigarette lighters are uncertain in real life. If one has to be used and it fails to work, the player should have matches and an appropriate remark ready. Some plays call for the knocking out of a pipe in the fireplace. If only unconvincing wooden noises are likely to be the result, this business is best omitted. Incidentally, modern acting editions often specify when a character must light up, stub out, or empty a pipe; often in practice this does not work out.

Portable Lights

Naked flame on the stage is dangerous; paraffin oil must not be used—hence such properties are best lighted electrically. (See Chapter V on Effects.)

Food and Drink

Real food can sometimes be used, but it is not always practicable. Sometimes players have to talk through their eating; moist foods, easily swallowed, are advisable. Coloured jellies, thick corn-flour, and custard can be disguised to represent many dishes. Sliced fruit can similarly form the basis of meat, poultry, etc., but large joints and hams are best made from papier mâché (see below). Bread-and-butter and sandwiches should be as thin as possible, and fillings, such as watercress, cucumber, or tomato, which are likely to put a player in difficulties, should be avoided. Hot water, poured over a stage "meal", can suggest hot food. A point is usually available back-stage for an electric kettle.

Tea, coffee, and cocoa can be real and freshly made, care being taken to ensure that the teapot holds sufficient to provide drink for all the players who have to take it. If tea cannot conveniently be made, a thermos flask can be used to keep a supply hot, the beverage being turned into the tea-pot or coffee-pot at the last moment. Beware of the skin on warmed milk. There is no convincing substitute for beer; therefore the real drink should be used. The use of real wines and spirits should be avoided: we *have* seen performances marred by the use of real intoxicants! Ginger ale looks like champagne. Water or lemonade can be tinted with cochineal or burnt sugar to look like wine. A small amount of bottled coffee will turn water into whisky or brandy, and diluted plum-juice can be a pleasant substitute for port wine. For gin, plain water is sufficient.

Telephones

These can be borrowed from the telephone authorities free of charge, provided mention is made of the courtesy in the programme. Telephone connexion should follow the lines of an actual G.P.O. installation. If the phone is away from a wall, the flex should run down to the floor, where, if it is visible to the audience, it should finish at a terminal block,

i.e. a small piece of wood painted black. If real electrical connexion is made with an effects panel (see Chapter V), the phone should be sited as near the flat as possible to avoid a length of flex trailing across the floor: a mat can sometimes be used to cover the flex and to keep it out of the way of awkward feet.

Papier Mâché

This useful material can be used to make numerous properties, from a grape to a tree-trunk. Therefore its preparation and use are described in detail.

There are two main methods: (1) the shape is made by successive layers of paste-soaked strips of paper laid one on the other, partly overlapping, and the whole being allowed to dry; (2) shredded paper is pulped with paste, modelled, and allowed to dry. The first method is suitable for properties such as joints of meat, headgear, animal heads, logs, tree-trunks, images, large vases and jars. The basic shape is made with crumpled newspaper, disciplined, if necessary, with string or wire. Objects such as tree trunks require a stronger framework of chicken-wire, reinforced, if necessary, with wooden struts. Over this base are placed soaked strips torn (not cut) 2-3 ins. wide. (Heavily glazed paper is unsuitable.) Cold water paste of a creamy consistency is suitable. The strips should overlap, and, occasionally, the surface of the model should be brushed over with a brush loaded with paste. For extra strength, a few glued strips of rag can be used with the paper. The final thickness varies with the size of the model, and ranges from $\frac{1}{8}$ in. to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. While it is still wet, the shape can be modelled to a small extent with the fingers by pinching out or building up. Papier mâché made by the second method (see below) can be added and modelled. When the object is dry, it can be sandpapered and painted. This method can be used for reproducing shapes from moulds, such as bowls, plaques, or clay models. The articles should be oiled and a layer of unpasted paper applied. The paper should be torn into small pieces, pasted, and smoothed on to the

article, care being taken to press well into any decorative feature. This should continue until about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thickness is obtained. If the *mâché* is applied to the inside of a mould, it can be left to dry before being removed, but if it "surrounds" the model, it should be removed while still wet, filled with crumpled newspaper, and rejoined with more overlapping paste-strips.

For small objects, or for making decorative reliefs or detailed small shapes, the second method is preferable. The paper is torn into shreds and soaked for 24 hours; boiling helps to pulp the mixture. The surplus water is squeezed out, and to two cupsful of this mixture one of paste powder is added, the whole being kneaded and pummelled until the pulp adheres. There should be sufficient moisture in the pulp to mix the paste; if not, water should be added sparingly. Kneading can be done with a short length of broomstick and a bowl. The mixture is ready if a smooth surface, free from lumps, is obtained when the back of a spoon is drawn across it, and if it retains its shape when modelled. Powdered whiting or ordinary household flour must be added and thoroughly mixed; otherwise the preparation will be too sticky to handle. When modelling, the hands can be rubbed in flour to keep them from sticking. When modelled, the article should be allowed to dry slowly, although to hasten the process it can be placed in an oven at low temperature. There will be a slight shrinkage in drying. Small cavities that appear on drying can be filled with "Alabastine." When thoroughly dry, the object can be sandpapered, sized, and painted.

Experiment with *papier mâché* is essential. First efforts will not always be successful, but once the technique is mastered it is extremely useful and inexpensive.

With all properties the golden rule is that they shall appear to be right under stage conditions. What is right in real life may not be correct on the stage as is evidenced by the appearance of the natural complexion when it is seen under strong lighting. Experiment is the best guide. There is the story of the adjudicator who adversely criticized a weapon as being

unconvincing and out of period. Later the S.M. no doubt with some triumph, showed him the gun. It bore the year and place of manufacture, both of which were in strict accordance with the play: but the adjudicator may still have been right.

CHAPTER V

EFFECTS

EFFECTS consist of any unusual sounds or special visual features that occur on or off the stage during a performance. The methods that are adopted to achieve effects are many. We offer ideas and a few hints, and warn against the use of effects for "effects' sake." Undue novelty can distract an audience, and theatrical devices that are not essentials can well be omitted. For example, it may be wiser to dispense with thunder and lightning if the noise *sounds* like a thunder sheet and the flash *looks* like the flicking of a switch. Unconvincing effects mark amateur status.

Sound effects can either be obtained on records, or be manual, i.e. produced by means of hand-operated appliances. Whichever method is used, the sound should appear to come from its appropriate source, and should not drown dialogue. These obvious precautions are often overlooked. Conversely, scenery, curtains, and people deaden sound and allowances must be made for this fact. Only experiment can give the S.M. his correct effect, and if it is not possible to rehearse under the conditions of the final performance, it is better to under-do rather than over-do the effect.

Recorded effects are increasingly popular with amateurs. A turntable and amplifier (sometimes known as a panatrope) with two speakers form the equipment. This can be hired, bought, or, perhaps, made if a skilled radio engineer is available. The equipment should be as portable as possible. Of the two speakers, one is usually used in front of the curtains for incidental music, and the other back-stage for effects. The plugs of these two speakers should be of different colours so that the S.M. can easily identify the leads, and make certain that the correct speaker is in use.

Using the Amplifier

Most sound effects are obtainable on records; the sound effects for the whole of some popular plays are available on one record. Each effect is separated on the record by a narrow, smooth band, and it is advisable to number, or mark, this in white Indian ink in order to identify the different sections. All records should be clearly marked with a stick-on label that gives the title and any special features that should be noted. Placing the needle in the correct groove calls for practice. It should be rehearsed at an early stage, and not left to be "tacked on" either at the dress rehearsal or public performance. Under-rehearsal will shake the confidence not only of the S.M., but also of members of the cast, who are easily put off by unaccustomed noises. The volume should be turned down before the needle is placed in the groove, and then increased as necessary. This is ascertained by experiment, and when it is decided, the dial reading should be noted. It can also be marked with chalk, or by cribbage pegs inserted in drilled holes in the dial. Volume can vary with the type of needle used. Some records are satisfactory only when used with a light-weight pick-up.

It is useful to have a simple rack to hold the records during a performance; when left about, they are easily broken, and amplifying apparatus gives off heat that damages them. Often, however, the deep lid fitted to most amplifiers suffices. It is advisable to watch the wear and tear of a record as an over-worked disc may produce little else than a scratchy noise. A further warning is: recordings, even of the same music or effect, sometimes vary. We rehearsed for weeks with a record and obtained a new one for the performance but during the check-up on the night the new record itself, "swung," dragged badly, and had to be abandoned. Nothing should be left to chance.

Record labels usually remind users that re-playing to the public is copyright and that permission should first be obtained.

A microphone can be used with an amplifier. It is not essential but it can be useful for special effects such as the "telephone" or "radio" voice, crackling fire (using crumpled "Cellophane" paper) and many more interesting sounds that are discovered by experiment. But a microphone is apt to be temperamental, and a thorough try-out beforehand is essential. Care must be taken that the actual voice is not heard from the wings—only the reproduced sound—and when several people are speaking into the microphone, it must be ascertained how near and at what angle they need to be to the instrument; they may also have to alter their voices to suit its range.

We have seen microphones hopefully "concealed" about the stage to amplify the voices of the cast. Uniformity of volume can seldom be obtained by this method, and often a double-voice is heard by members of the audience who are close to the speakers; in any event, no dramatic society worthy of its name should resort to these measures.

Manual Effects

These are numerous. We describe a few of the commoner types. An S.M. will develop a keen ear for sounds of everyday life that can be reproduced simply for any future plays and he can be well occupied, between productions, in experimenting.

Bells

For the modern door-bell the actual bell can be rigged up by an amateur or, more simply, the small units (battery, bell, and push) can be bought, but care must be taken to operate the bell where the ring is supposed to be heard; the siting of a bell may call for "remote control," in which case the battery and switch are mounted on a board placed in a convenient position—if necessary, hung round the S.M.'s neck. Such a bell is useful for recalling an audience between acts. Striking clock—or heavy—bells can be represented by a length of solid-drawn piping, the tone of which can be altered by shortening or drilling. It is suspended perpendicularly by one length of rope and struck with a piece of padded wood. Another

length of rope is attached to the lower end and held. (If suspended from one end, and not steadied, a pendulum momentum is liable to be set up as the pipe is struck repeatedly; this can be difficult to control.) Undue reverberation can be checked by grasping the piping. The old-fashioned school handbell can be useful, and, if it is correctly swung, can give the effect of the spring-mounted bell that was used in Victorian houses. The modern tubular chiming bells can be transferred complete to the wings and struck by hand to give this rather distinctive effect.

Door Knocker

Too often this consists of banging a heavy object on the floor of the stage. A real knocker should be mounted on a board and tried out against a wall, a door, or the floor.

Slamming Door

A real door should be slammed, if possible. Alternatively, a length of wood 4 ft. by 6 ins. is used. Rope is attached to one end with a screw-eye and held by the operator; the board is laid on the floor flat, one foot is placed on it, the other behind; it is then lifted and released to strike the floor. (See Figure 22.) A piece of sprung steel at the bottom of the board will give the double click effect usually heard when a door closes. If the sound is too "hard," a piece of carpet should be used to muffle the blow.

Horses

Coco-nut shells cannot be bettered, but they require practice. If neighing is also required, a record is safer, unless a talented impersonator is available.

Gravel Paths

A large wooden tray is filled with gravel and walked on, the operator "marking time"; or heavy wire mesh ("chain link" fencing) is placed between two thick cardboard sheets and walked on.

Broken Glass

This should be real broken glass (obtainable from a builder's merchant); it can be poured from one box into another. It needs careful handling. Large-scale crash effects are best obtained by recordings.

Crowds and Voices Off-stage

Small crowds can usually be represented by the members of the cast and stage-staff, but they should be rehearsed in the use of actual words and speeches. Vague, impromptu mumblings are not convincing.

Thunder and Lightning

A sheet of thin metal-plate (sometimes used to back the household sink) is suspended by means of a piece of thick string and shaken for a crackle effect. (See Figure 23.) Tin-plate is not satisfactory. A drum roll, or an open cistern tank rumbled with a padded hammer, is necessary for the echo. The effect of sheet (reflected) lightning can be achieved by flicking light switches. If this involves the noisy clicking of snap switches (lightning precedes thunder), it may be possible to make and break electrical contact by means of a connecting plug, which can be set so that slight pushing and withdrawing can give the flicker without noise. If the switchboard is fitted with sliding dimmer controls, these can be moved up and down with an irregular motion. Other, more complicated, methods of getting a lightning effect are possible, but these are best left to an electrician.

Pistol Shot and Gun Fire

Bamboo cane brought down on a leather, or similar, chair will suffice, or a starting pistol can be used. For heavy, distant gunfire the tank or drum is required (an inverted plywood tea-chest will sometimes do service as a drum). For machine-gun fire, a bird-scaring rattle (as used by football fans) should be tried out, the rattle being turned slowly by hand and not swung.

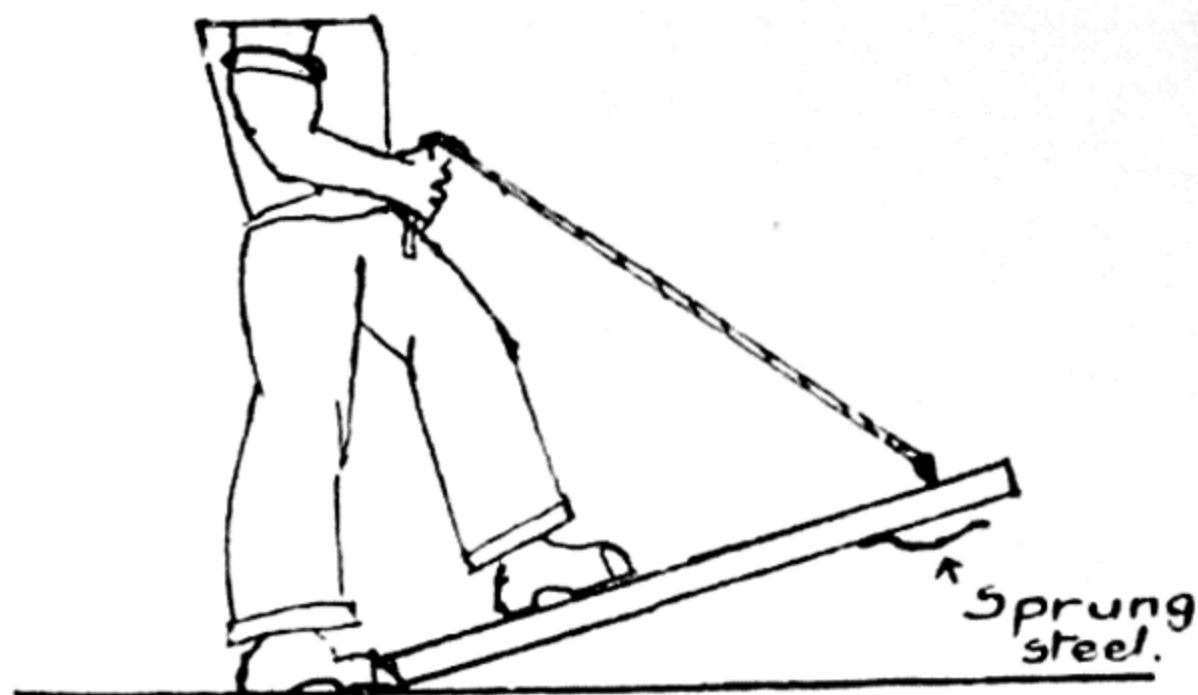


Fig. 22: Door Slam and method of using.

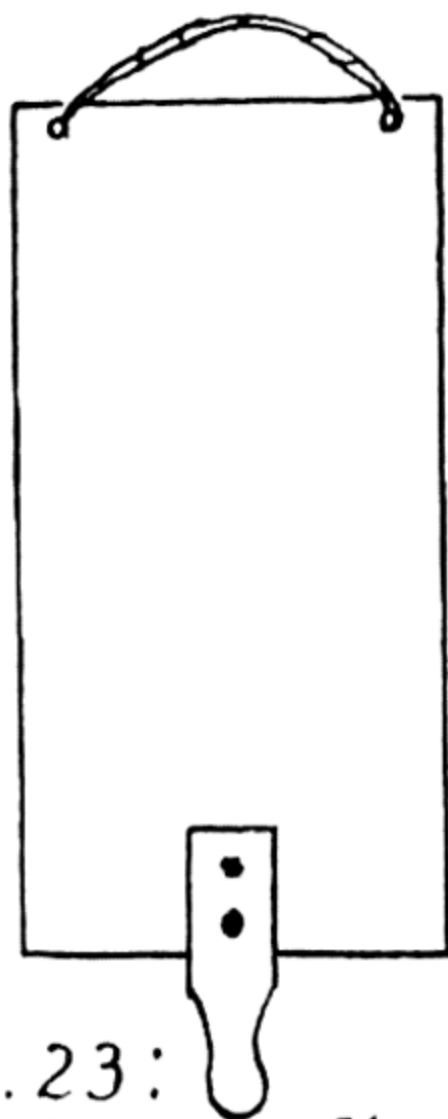


Fig. 23: Thunder Sheet.

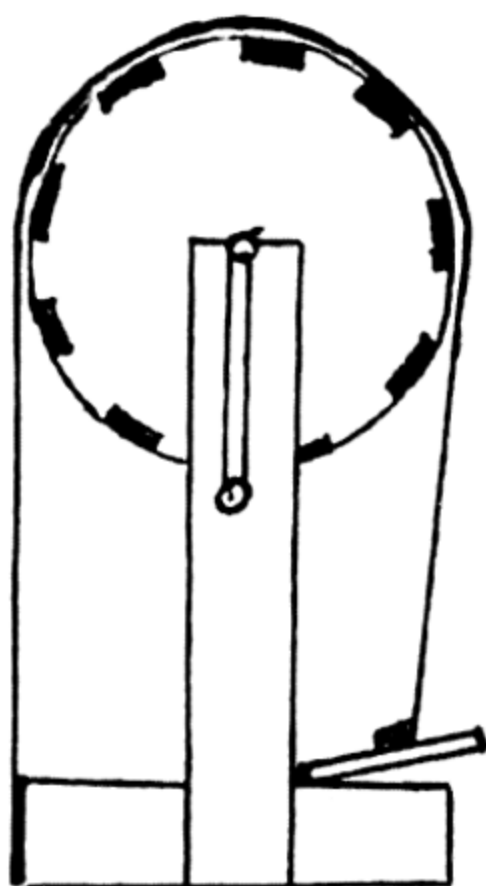


Fig. 24: Wind Machine (end view)

Ace No. 4416

Fireworks

The hissing sound of a rocket or squib-type firework is best done by voices in the wings (hissing through clenched teeth). This is followed by the report, which can often be convincingly suggested by the bursting of a paper bag. Or the pistol can be used. The coloured glow effect of some fireworks can be obtained by a coloured floodlight controlled by a dimmer switch, or by striking coloured matches.

Surf and Waves

A large round tray (a converted sieve will do) is loaded with small lead shot, which is swished around by a circular movement. For effects of only a short period, however, a recording which can include the cry of gulls will give more atmosphere.

Rice grains will similarly give the sound of spray, and, if dropped into the tray suddenly from a low position, can give the impression of a body or object falling into water.

Rain

A handful of dried peas or lead shot can be rotated on a drum or in a fine-mesh sieve. An ordinary tray or a cardboard lid (gown boxes are often available in the dressing-room) can sometimes be used to obtain a similar effect, but, because of the oblong shape, the steady sound required is less easily controlled. To obtain the visual effect of rain, rice is allowed to fall steadily, preferably lighted by a spot light. If the visible area is large, a long trough, with holes through which the rice is allowed to fall, is required. In practice, this is apt to be complicated. If rain *must* be seen, we suggest that the S.M. should have his window space small, and covered, if the play permits, with net curtain.

Wind

This is created by a wind machine, which consists of a wooden drum on a stand. The drum is slatted, and stretched over it is a piece of canvas, weighted at one end and anchored to the framework at the other. The drum is revolved by

means of a handle. If the free end is pulled down, the sound is heavier. This can be done by hand or by connecting the end with ropes and a treadle which can be controlled with the foot. (See Figure 24.) The faster the drum revolves, the higher the "wind." The visual effect of wind (usually moving curtains) can be obtained by wafting air with a large sheet of ply or boarding. For steady effects an electric fan is needed.

Fog

A series of fine mesh nettings, known as gauze or scrim, lowered from the "grid" at intervals, can give the effect of thickening fog, but this may not be possible with a small society. Actual fog can be made by pouring hot water over "Cardice" or "Dri-Kold" (frozen air) obtainable in block form from ice-cream merchants. This must not be touched with the bare hand or blisters will result. The vapour produced can be wafted on to the stage. The S.M. must remember that such fog will probably need dispersing, before the next scene, by smothering the block with old sacking and removing it, and by ventilating the stage thoroughly. Failing these methods it is best to rely on subdued lighting and the acting skill of the cast.

Snow

For large, continuous effects, a snow trough is needed. This is made of canvas with holes through which the snow (torn white paper) is allowed to fall (the paper can be varnished to make it glisten). As with rain, given a small, slightly obscured window, the "snow" can be dropped by hand. Should a door be open to reveal the outside, then the snow must appear there too!

Trains

Sandpaper blocks rubbed together, or blowing direct into a microphone, will take a "train" out of the station, but recorded effects of all train noises are so much more realistic that they should be used.

Cars

Car noises are best recorded, but the modern car is certainly not noisy and the effect can often be omitted without loss of realism. A door slam can often suggest a car drawn up or about to pull away. The screech of brakes can be produced by the squeak of air forced through compressed lips, using a microphone with adequate rehearsal!

Water

Old clothes and properties of no value, if treated with varnish and allowed to dry, will appear wet. An umbrella can be treated in this way.

Lighting

We merely touch on this important branch of stagecraft as the subject is adequately covered by a separate handbook in this Series.

The lighting equipment of a small hall is usually limited to two or three "battens" of overhead lights and a row of foot-lights. The lamps used are not usually coloured and the S.M. may need to supply coloured gelatines, the detailed uses and effects of which cannot be dealt with here. Auxiliary lighting is obtained by floodlights, which can flood the stage with light or be used to illuminate back-cloths, and spot lights, which pick out a very small area. This is the basic equipment with which the S.M. must usually achieve his effects. The lights are controlled by ordinary tumbler switches, or sometimes by sliding resistance switches that enable the lights to vary from zero to full brightness. These are known as dimmers. Gradual sunsets, sunrises, darkening skies, etc., call for their use.

The counsel of adequate preparation and rehearsal applies even more strongly to lighting, for the pitfalls are many. For example, a total black-out is often impossible owing to exit lights near the stage. Switches can be noisy and destroy illusion; a thick duster may help to muffle them. Often only part of the equipment is connected to dimmers, imported

equipment which runs from sockets or dips, is not. The operation of the switchboard itself often requires a small working light owing to darkness in the wings, but this light must not "leak" on to the stage in dark scenes. Flexes can trip the unwary, lamps can fail, and fuses can blow. House (audience) lights are sometimes controlled by switches both in the hall and back-stage. Stage lighting may suit everybody except the prompter who may sometimes find his corner in semi-darkness. We do not intend to discourage experiment, or to suggest that lighting is bound to prove a nuisance, but there are factors that the efficient S.M. should bear in mind. Small precautions, such as putting a switch out of action with adhesive tape, chalking clearly on the switchboard what lights are controlled, etc., covering loose flex with a mat, having a torch handy, and so on, may prevent an effect being spoiled.

Fires, Lamps, and Candles

These are really properties, but we introduce them here because they rely on effects. A fire should be built up realistically, using logs, coal, and gelatines (coloured transparent sheets) of the right colour, supported by wire netting and lit by one or more light bulbs. A flicker effect can be obtained by centring a small propeller-shaped piece of metal on a pivot over the lamp (as found in some modern electric fires); the heat of the bulbs causes this to revolve, giving the effect of a moving light.

The same effect can be achieved by a fluorescent light starter-fuse run in circuit. The lower the wattage of the bulb, the greater the flicker. This is often more convenient than the propeller method, which calls for precision adjustment. If the S.M. is not familiar with the term "run in circuit," an electrician should be consulted.

Real flame is not allowed on the stage, and portable oil lamps, storm lamps, etc., should be converted into battery-operated lights. The S.M. could experiment with the small dimmer switches obtainable from war department surplus stores; these switches can be fitted to replace the normal wick control. Electric candles can be bought or hired, but an

ordinary cylindrical pencil torch built up with crepe paper will often suffice. The candle-stick may be so constructed as to allow the "candle" to be pushed down into it, thus creating the illusion of its burning away. The introduction of such portable lights calls for appropriate lighting changes, but detailed treatment of this subject is outside the scope of this book.

CHAPTER VI

REHEARSALS

THE professional S.M. is not expected to be present at rehearsals, but the amateur S.M. is, as he can then get to know the play thoroughly and keep a check on the producer, players, and prompter. During the last few rehearsals the S.M. should be in a position to take over from the producer, if necessary—hence the importance of his script. He should see that the cast can handle properties, or substitutes, and that they mime opening and closing doors, etc., as soon as words are learnt and the rehearsals are well under way. Before each rehearsal the outline of the set and positions of the main furniture should be marked with chalk (actual furniture can be used if available), or some means should be found to get the cast used to performance conditions. The producer may be glad of help in keeping the cast “up to scratch,” i.e. arriving on time, maintaining silence during rehearsal, and being ready to enter on their cues. A special word about the prompter is desirable. Prompting is often handed over to a newcomer or to the odd-man-out, especially if the group is small. Prompting is an important job, and the prompter can be encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility not limited to an occasional correction or prompt “on the night.” During rehearsals the actors’ moves should be noted by the prompter, using the right-hand column of the prompt copy, in pencil; pauses must be marked in the actual text by means of a symbol; (e.g. ☹) agreed on by the producer, S.M., and prompter. The prompter should get used to observing when an actor is in difficulty with his words; to do this he will have to watch the scene as well as follow the text: the symptom of distress may be a blank look or a glance thrown towards the defaulter by another

player. Unfortunately, in rehearsals the cast gets into the habit of calling on the prompter verbally, usually with an apology. This is unfair to the prompter. Trick warnings such as coughs, movements of the hands, etc., should be avoided: they are the mark of bad workmanship and are usually detected. When the prompter has to give a cue, he should give it clearly and in the intonation of the speech. Some players prefer a key word or phrase to be given to them, but the actual words forgotten are safer. In the event of a muddled speech, the experienced prompter will skip the tangled section and give a cue further on that suggests a new train of thought; it may even be necessary to cut out the speech altogether and to give a cue to another speaker. Small inaccuracies should be pointed out to the players after a scene; the action should not be interrupted. During final rehearsals the producer may also wish to dispense with the prompter and to make his cast improvise their way through difficulties. Finally, all members of the group should at some time have experience at prompting.

Effects should be used as early as possible, not only for the sake of practice but also so that the cast can get used to having them as a background, speaking "over" them, if necessary. Also some effects, such as pistol shots, can be startling especially if they are omitted until the actual performance. As the cast becomes word-perfect, the actual cue-word for placing the needle in the groove, ringing the bell, etc., can be marked; previous warning cues will also be needed, and if the S.M. will be working with helpers, he must rehearse his system of communication, be it whispered instruction, hand signal, or numbered reference card held up in view of the operator of the lights or effect. Some theatres have a system of "cue-lights," one colour for the warning and one for the actual operation, wired from the prompt corner to the operator, but unless thoroughly rehearsed these are best left alone. At final rehearsals the S.M. should try to position his helpers as they will be on the night.

Before the dress rehearsal the play should have been timed

—each act and scene with its intervals, the incidental music, estimated scene-changing, etc. The timing of a costume-change within a scene must not be overlooked, nor must the distance from stage to dressing-room be forgotten; and if the voice of the player who is changing is to be heard off-stage, it may be necessary for a “stand-in” to speak for him.

It is a good idea to have a S.M.’s rehearsal a few days before the dress rehearsal proper. At this the cast can rehearse their costume-changing and the S.M. his scene-changing, effects, property drill, etc. This differs from the dress rehearsal in that interpretation and artistic considerations are secondary; probably stretches of dialogue can be cut. Nevertheless, on the stage management side absolute discipline and routine are essential. At this stage the producer should be unnecessary, but any orders from him to the S.M.’s helpers should be given through the S.M. The cast should not interfere with properties that are not their concern; they should be out of the way but within call. Some effects, etc., will not be possible, failing the use of the hall for this rehearsal, but lighting changes can be called out—perhaps mimed—and a portable gramophone can give correct timing for recordings.

As the full dress-rehearsal should follow the lines of the actual performance to the public (discussed in the next chapter) it need not be dealt with separately, but one or two points may be given. Dress rehearsals are usually long and trying, and the members should be warned accordingly. A bad dress-rehearsal does not mean a good performance; probably some dress rehearsals have been so bad that any subsequent performance has seemed wonderful in comparison—hence the superstition! Nevertheless, the group should not be too discouraged by events. The company may think this an appropriate time for stage photographs, and if this is the province of the S.M., he should have his “pictures” clearly in mind. Much valuable time can be wasted by impromptu groupings with an overwrought cast.

As this is probably the final meeting of the company before “the night,” extra care must be taken to see that all hand

properties are in order and in the right hands, available for collection, if necessary (though it is usually best for the cast to be responsible for their own at this stage). Stage properties should be carefully checked and stacked, or packed, and ready for transport to the theatre—or they should be stored in the wings if the dress rehearsal has been held there. Finally, the cast and back-stage helpers should receive clear instructions on their responsibilities and the general procedure “on the night.”

CHAPTER VII

ON THE NIGHT

THE more preliminaries that can be got over *before* the night of the public performance, the better. (Here we assume a routine that may actually begin some days before "the night.")

Scenery and properties should be loaded methodically and checked. Small properties should be contained in large boxes, cases, etc., especially if they are fragile. Glassware will require protective packing (newspapers screwed up). Expensive equipment should be left to the last, or conveyed separately in a car. All this may be a contractor's responsibility, but the S.M. should supervise, or delegate supervision. Scenery is sometimes struck and loaded late at night after a show, in which case a working light on the lorry will be useful.

Meanwhile, the stage should have been cleared and swept and the S.M. should then draw a rough plan of the set with chalk on the floor, deciding on a point for erecting his first flat (e.g. a door or window may have to be in a particular spot), though if his preliminary survey work and plans are correct the siting should be accurate automatically.

Erecting a Set

The first flat should be placed in position and braced on both sides to hold it rigid; the next flat is then placed edge to edge with the first, following the chalkline. The two are then lashed, i.e. tied together, using the rope and cleats. (See Figure 12, Chapter III.) Throwing the line over the top cleat needs practice, but if the knack is mastered, the time-wasting use of steps is avoided. This procedure is followed with each flat until the set is erected, after which, strategic

points (e.g. behind doors, corners, etc.) should be braced. Should the screwing down of the braces into the floor be difficult (e.g. shallow parquet flooring is liable to split and some stage-boardings is too thin to screw into), sandbags or brace-weights should be used to hold them down.

Brace-weights can be made from scrap lead-piping, or cable, melted down. These, and the braces, are best painted white to make them show up in the dim light back-stage. When all flats are in position, any gaps at the joins should be sealed; this is called "stripping the join," and it is usually done by gluing or pinning strips of linen or old sacking behind the joins, but this is not advised if there are scene changes during the play. With the fibre-boardings flats these gaps are less likely. If gaps at the top of the flats are due to the rake of the stage, the back flats will have to lean forward slightly to fit those at the sides. Where flats are set at an angle to the rake gaps will appear at the bottom; one of these flats will then require to be packed at its base to tilt it into a correct position.

The clearance of the doors and french windows should be checked and practical windows should be tested. With an assistant moving in the auditorium checking on lines of sight, the backings should be placed into position. Make sure the cast have room to move in and out of the doors without squeezing. Any rostra or stairs should then be positioned; if a rostrum leads off-stage, it should not stop abruptly just out of sight of the audience or the cast will glance down as they use it; a table, a few desks, or even a chair, will help the player to walk off safely and convincingly. Stairs and rostra should be tested for stability and strength, especially if a player has to run up or down. Excessive ladder work is tiring and a ladder or steps should be used methodically, special precautions being taken with a raked stage. It will be needed to hang curtains, pelmets, and the borders, if these are necessary. One or more borders may be required to hide the "grid" from the audience, and should be tested from the centre of the front row; these are usually in the form of curtains, 2 ft. wide, stretched across the width of the stage.

The stage should now be ready for "dressing"; the carpet, if any, is laid, the pictures hung, and the furniture put into position, in consultation with the producer. *Stage* properties, such as clocks, vases, ash trays, etc., can be set out, but *hand* properties used by the cast are best kept away from the stage; they should be accessible and easily checked.

Lighting should then be tested. A model should walk about the stage, and the S.M. should observe the effect. If the stage has an "apron," it may be necessary to warn the cast not to use it, as, unless there are corrective front-of-house lights, they are likely to move into shadow. Floodlights should be adjusted, and if any are used to light back-cloths and are behind the set, all other lights should be dimmed and the S.M. should stand in the auditorium and test for gaps and general effect. Floodlights have vents that sometimes give a light-leakage; they can be shielded but not blocked, for their purpose is to ventilate and cool the light. Cables to floods and spots should be slung across the grid, if possible, and not trailed across the floor. All light switches should be tested, and the lighting cues gone over with the assistant, who must have his cue-sheet to hand; if time allows, a run-through of the cues with lighting changes should be taken. Lights, particularly floods and spots, should not be left on unnecessarily for the lamps have a limited life.

Attention must now be given to the amplifier, making sure that it is not linked with the lighting circuits (or if it is, that precautions are taken to keep its control separate). An amplifier and turntable should be given time to warm up. Each speaker should be tested separately. If only one is available to cope with effects from various points, it should be placed centrally at the back of the stage. Half-way down the hall the S.M. should listen and give instructions about the volume, remembering to allow for the talking and shuffling of the audience during intervals, and for the damping effect of a crowded house. Music, or effects, with dialogue should then be tried out; the rule is that the speech takes precedence. If the dialogue can be heard over the recorded sound at about

three-quarters of the way down the hall, it is likely to be satisfactory.

The cast should now be invited to come on the stage to "get the feel of it" and to try out their voices, etc. They should not be allowed to move furniture or properties unless instructed to do so by the producer and S.M., and they should be warned of any danger spots (tricky doors, obstacles, unlighted areas, etc., which may be unavoidable, even in the best-organized production). The cast should then be sent off to get ready (most of them should already be made up, as the producer should be able to test make-up under stage lights), and stage properties not already on the stage should be carefully arranged in the wings—preferably on a table. If possible, they should be marked with the act, scene, and character who will use them. There should also be a final check with the cast responsible for their own hand properties.

If the hall-doors are not secured, a watch must be kept on early arrivals, for members of the audience should not see the stage with curtains open. When the curtains are drawn, they should be tested thoroughly, then left alone. Peeping through them "isn't done".

Front-of-house stewards should be at the ready and know their cue for "house lights off" and the cast should be given periodical warnings of time, the last being about five minutes before curtain time, when the foot-lights should be put on to "settle" the audience. The final instruction will be "on stage!" The S.M. may want the cast to remain in the dressing-room until their call. This may certainly ease pressure on wing-space. However, most amateurs prefer to watch their colleagues and they are more likely to catch the atmosphere of the play if they witness its progress, but they should remain in absolute silence in the wings. See also that the prompter is comfortably settled and ready. He should have a torch handy. The cast and stage-helpers are then told to "stand-by." If any member is not ready, there should be a clear reply "not ready," and no panic.

A prompt start creates a good impression; late beginnings

are all too common amongst amateurs. As the public judge the time from the hall clock, the S.M.'s own watch and timing should synchronize with it. Late-comers should not be pandered to; the society has a duty to its loyal—and prompt—fans as well as to the privileged, but sometimes late, front-row-V.I.P.s.

For a good start we suggest the following drill: HIT lights for Act I, Scene I, FADE incidental music, KILL house-lights, FADE in curtain music, CURTAIN, fade music (to "hit" and "kill" lights is to put them on or off); if the play does not have to open immediately with dialogue, the audience should be given a few seconds to absorb the scene; it may be, and should be, their only opportunity of appreciating the S.M.'s labours.

During the play, back-stage work should proceed calmly but cheerfully; this may help to reassure a nervous cast. If players are to need assistants for quick costume changes, these should be at the alert. Members of the cast should be particularly warned about moving to their dressing-rooms quietly at the end of their own appearance, or of the scene. Release of tension often produces high-pitched and audible voices. Intervals should be covered by suitable music, during which scene changes are effected, using the plan, if necessary. The cast should not be on the stage. Two minutes before the end of the intervals the audience should be recalled by a bell and the opening routine repeated. Intervals between acts call for house lights to be put on, but for breaks between scenes, the auditorium should be left in darkness.

After the final curtain, curtain calls are usually taken. These should be rehearsed and the atmosphere of the play held, if possible. Wigs should not be removed, and curtain calls should not be repeated unless applause warrants repetition. After the National Anthem the audience should hear suitably lively music; friends and relations should not be encouraged back-stage (either after or during the performance), nor should the cast appear at any time in costume or make-up outside the play. If further performances are to follow, a quick check is advisable before the members of the cast go home. Ideally,

everything should be set ready for the following night's performance.

This is not a rigid routine; local conditions and the number of helpers vary, but some routine, preparation, and "benevolent dictatorship" are essential to a smooth production. We have not dwelt on either the humorous or the human side of amateur productions. The keen S.M. will think of many things that we have not mentioned—the first-aid box, the beaker and carafe of drinking water in the wings for dry or nervous throats, the word of encouragement, the packet of throat pastilles, the handy pocket mirror, the packet of safety pins, and a confident smile despite everything. A happy team is often a good team, and successful amateur dramatic work is essentially a corporate effort.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DRAMA FESTIVAL

The Festival

A DRAMA festival consists of the performance of one-act plays and lasts from one or two days to a week. After the performances each evening an adjudicator comments on the performances and generally gives advice to the entrants. The adjudication is public. The S.M.'s society may enter such a festival and he may find himself appointed a festival S.M. Therefore, we deal with these two specialized aspects of stagecraft.

Festivals may be competitive or non-competitive. In competitive festivals marks, based on the standard of the production, acting, etc., are given. The section that chiefly concerns the S.M. is usually known as "Stage Presentation," for which a maximum of 10 per cent of the marks is allotted. Stage Presentation includes the design and effectiveness of the set, the lighting, costumes, make-up, and effects. Although 10 per cent may seem a small proportion of the total, it should be remembered that an efficient, perhaps inspired, setting, may stimulate the cast, improve the production, and generally contribute to dramatic achievement. Also poorly timed effects and mismanaged properties may adversely affect the performance, so the S.M. should not estimate his share in the festival performance at a mere tenth.

Planning

The general principles of stage management set out in previous chapters apply to festivals, but there may be important differences. The script will be prepared in the usual way. The stage survey may have to be carried out in a modified

form and in conjunction with the festival organizers; usually they supply the competing society with full particulars of lighting, properties, plan of the stage, etc. There will also be regulations that apply to time limits for setting, playing, and striking the play, the number of back-stage helpers, the type of additional scenery allowed, etc. These should be carefully borne in mind when the play is chosen and during the rehearsals.

The Festival Set

Most festival authorities stipulate a basic curtain set, which they provide, and allow one or more flats to suggest the scene. There are not usually any restrictions about furniture; it is safer for a team to supply its own and to be sure of its suitability, but the organizers often provide a few basic pieces, together with one or more rostra. If using the festival's furniture, the S.M. should see it in good time and assure himself that it is suitable for his play.

An adjudicator will not expect a high degree of realism under festival conditions, but he will look for the effective suggestion, artistic arrangement, and, if the type of play permits, colour and originality. These must be achieved with a scene that is capable of being quickly set and struck. The curtains themselves can be effectively arranged. They can be bunched together, for example, to produce a pillar effect, being fastened to the floor with drawing pins or being placed in boxes that represent plinths. Such adaptation will need backing, as will entrances and exits (unless the curtains are arranged to obviate this. (See Chapter III.) A door, fireplace, or window flat can be inserted in the curtain set simply by drawing the curtains aside and placing the flat in position.

It may be necessary to bring a curtain to the level of the top of the flat, in which case it can be shortened by rolling, the roll being away from the audience. There should be no attempt to make the curtains look like walls, etc., and pictures should not be hung on them. If possible, the flats should harmonize with the curtain surround, either matching or

contrasting. It is wise not to overdo the use of flats, as the result may be inartistic. They need not be used only as inserts; a flat on its side can represent a brick wall, or a ground-row (see Figure 27), or an upright flat can jut out from the side curtains to represent the end of a house. The keen S.M. will soon discover numerous ways of getting the best out of the limited provision at festivals.

It follows that the society should look for a play that gives scope for simple, but effective, staging, bearing in mind that it is the one-act play festival that provides opportunities in the amateur theatre for experimental work in stagecraft as well as authorship and production. As there is little financial return, the stage management should not be expensive. For an example of such plays we illustrate the sets of three festival one-act plays that have been performed by the authors' own dramatic group. (See Figures 25, 26, and 27.) In the preliminary performances of the first play the pillars were represented by curtains (see above) and a blue back-cloth was used.

When the play was performed at probably one of the largest town-hall stages in the country this would not work, for all drapes and fittings were in unrelieved black. The theme and setting of the play was Greek, and, therefore, simplicity and dignity were keynotes—hence the simple design shown was possible. Pillars were made from cereal cartons, flattened out, the seat from packing cases, plywood, and hessian. The rostra were covered with ceiling paper; the cost of the whole came to well under a pound. The height of the stage necessitated the pillars being made on the "extended flat" method (see Chapter III), and were thus usable for a number of subsequent performances at smaller halls. Figure 26 shows a simple setting using one door flat mounted on a rostrum and fronted with a small unit of stairs; the properties shown in the sketch were dummy packets built into units with "Cellotape"; the bar was a cupboard with its back facing the audience, and behind it was another rostrum. Figure 27 shows a period set (Elizabethan) again. Three flats were used, two adjoining representing an inn, and one on

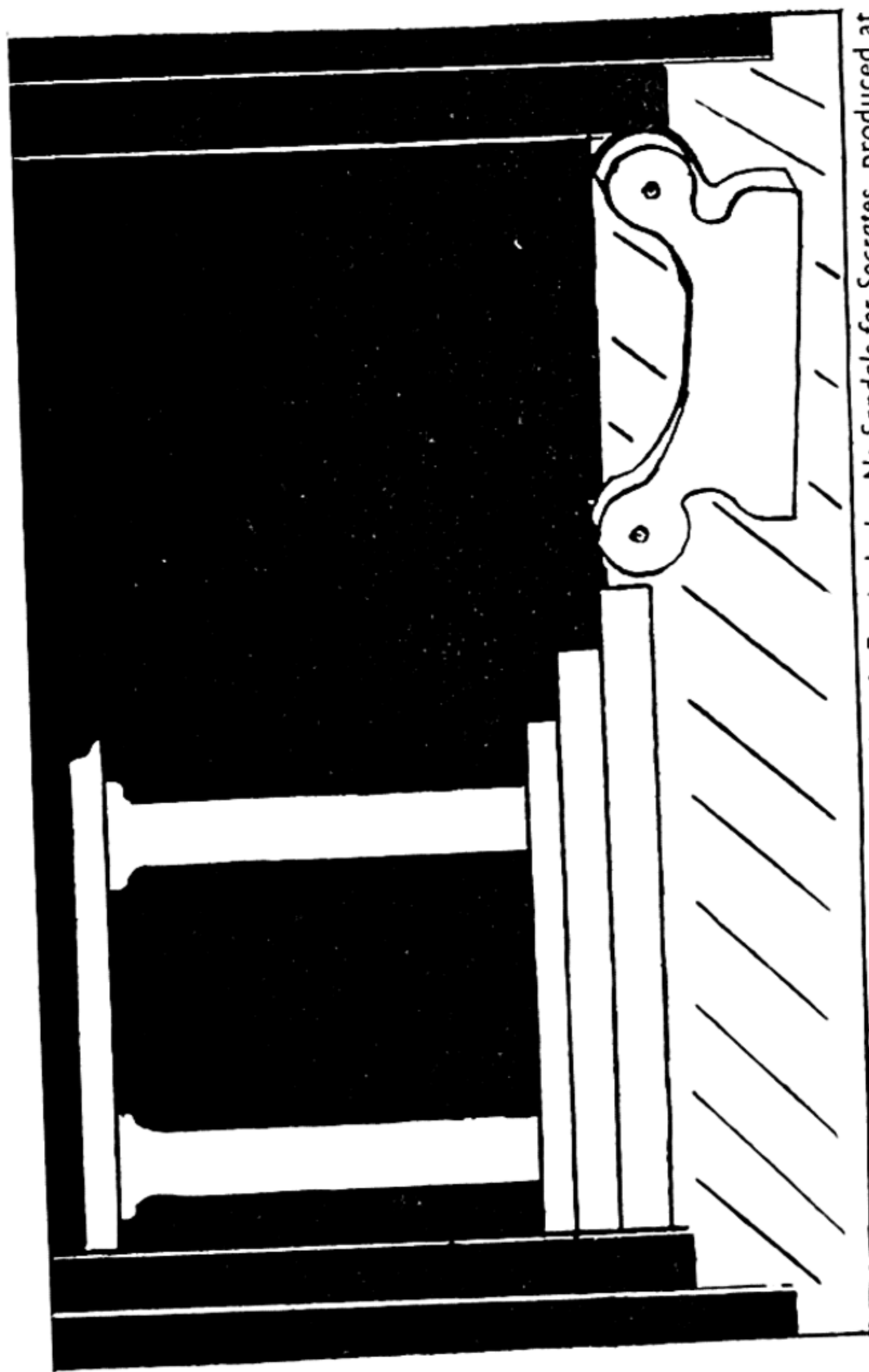


Fig. 25. Bill Howard's setting for A. J. Bradbury's Festival play *No Sandals for Socrates*, produced at the Wembley Town Hall.

its side representing a brick wall. The porch and signpost were made readily detachable by means of slotted socket fittings. These three settings were set and struck well within the limits imposed by the organizers of the festivals at which they were performed.

Effects

A wide range of effects is usually available at a festival: an amplifier and turntable, dimmer switchboard, and movable spotlights and floodlights form part of the equipment. (See below.) The festival organizers will require a copy of the play and a lighting plot. The actual manipulation of the lights and effects will sometimes be in the hands of the resident festival S.M. This plot will need careful preparation, for on it may depend the timing and correctness of the effects, and the S.M. can work efficiently only if he has clear information before him. Sometimes a marked text, following the S.M.'s own prepared script, can be supplied to the resident S.M. Preferably, however, the competing society should be responsible for as much of the back-stage work as possible. Second-hand, often unrehearsed, instructions, are risky.

Rehearsals and Performances

It is important to time accurately the length of the performance, for some festival authorities disqualify for an excess of mere minutes. Otherwise, rehearsals proceed normally, but often with increased intensity and more exacting standards, for herein lies the value of the festival. Firm but tactful discipline must be in evidence. On the night itself the procedure should follow the general lines set down in Chapter VII, excepting that it will be found advisable to allow the members of the cast to be responsible for bringing their own properties on to the stage when the scene is in position, and when they are allowed a quick try-out of doors, steps, windows, furniture drawers, etc. Only large properties should be kept in the wings just before the performance; small effects left lying about may be unwittingly removed by other teams.

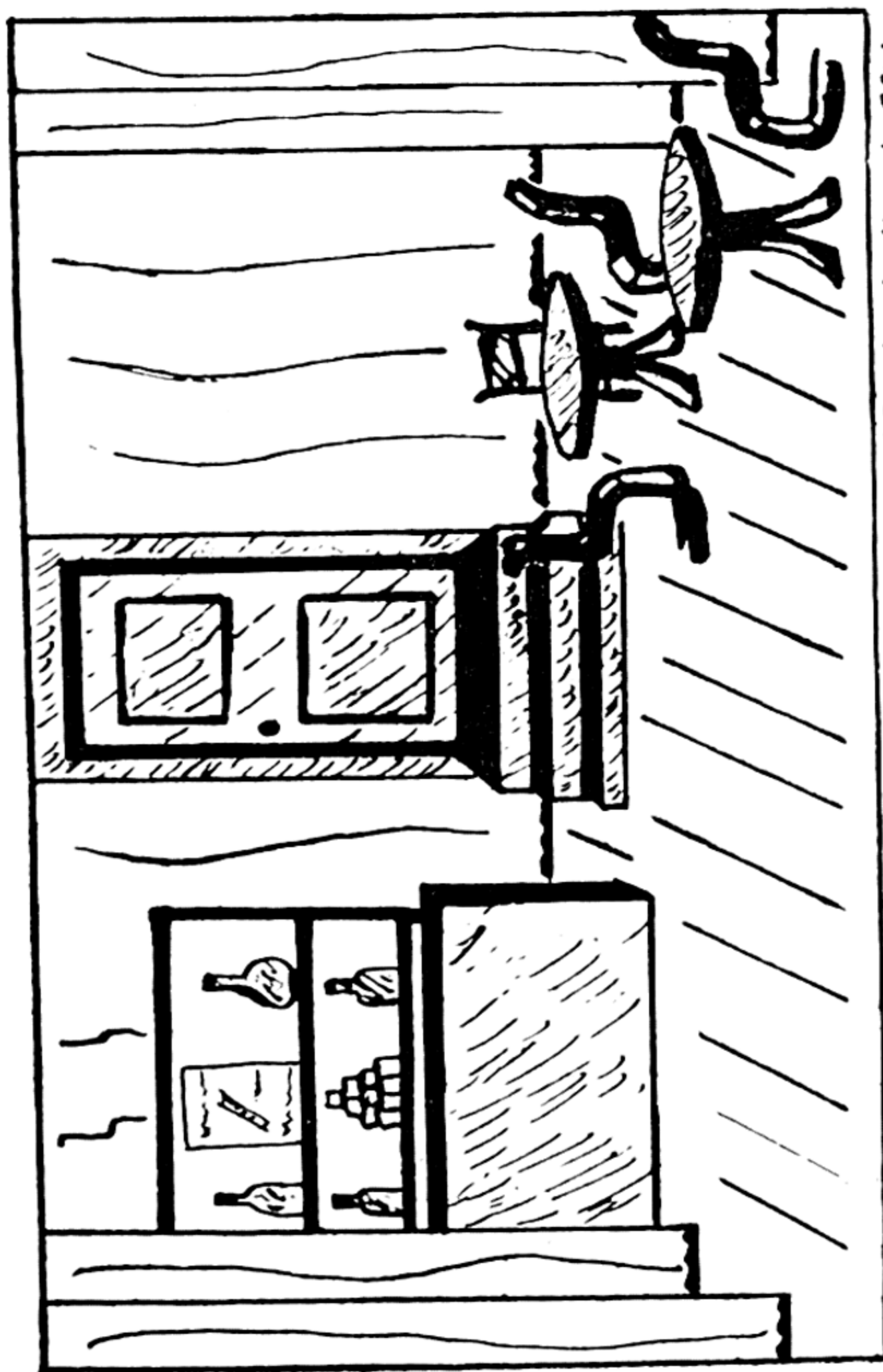


Fig. 26. A. J. Bradbury's "Bar-room" setting to curtains for his Festival One-Act play Air on the G String.

Curtain cues are given by the festival S.M. and not the team's own S.M. Calm confidence before and during the play is vital. Prompts should be clear, and the cast should be warned to "act through" any technical hitches or dry-ups as naturally as possible. Forgotten lines in themselves are not likely to lose the team many points; it is the loss of illusion and dramatic effect that knocks off the marks.

At the end of the performance the team may have a duty towards other groups. The set should be struck without fuss and every facility given to the rival team that follows. Good sportsmanship should be a feature of competition in the amateur theatre no less than in the field of games and athletics.

The Festival Stage Manager

The stage management of an entire drama festival is a responsible, worth-while job that calls for tactful authority, organizing ability, and a keen interest in festival drama itself. More than any other member of the festival organizing committee does the S.M. come into contact with participating drama teams.

Thorough planning is essential. A wide choice of halls is not usual, but the festival S.M. should investigate the possibilities in his district, and be in a position to advise the committee should the question of choice arise. Front-of-house considerations are likely to take precedence, but the play and its effective presentation are equally important. A fairly large stage is desirable, and plenty of room in the wings will make for smooth running. Lighting can usually be augmented (but the capacity of the lighting system must not be over-worked to the extent of fusing), and, if not already fitted, dimmer switch-boards can usually be inserted in the circuit. Storage space as near the stage as possible will be needed for the furniture and properties, which may have to serve many plays and not merely one evening's performance. If possible, the order of presenting the plays should be arranged to facilitate the movement of furniture, which should not be allowed to remain on the premises longer than necessary. Hence, in a

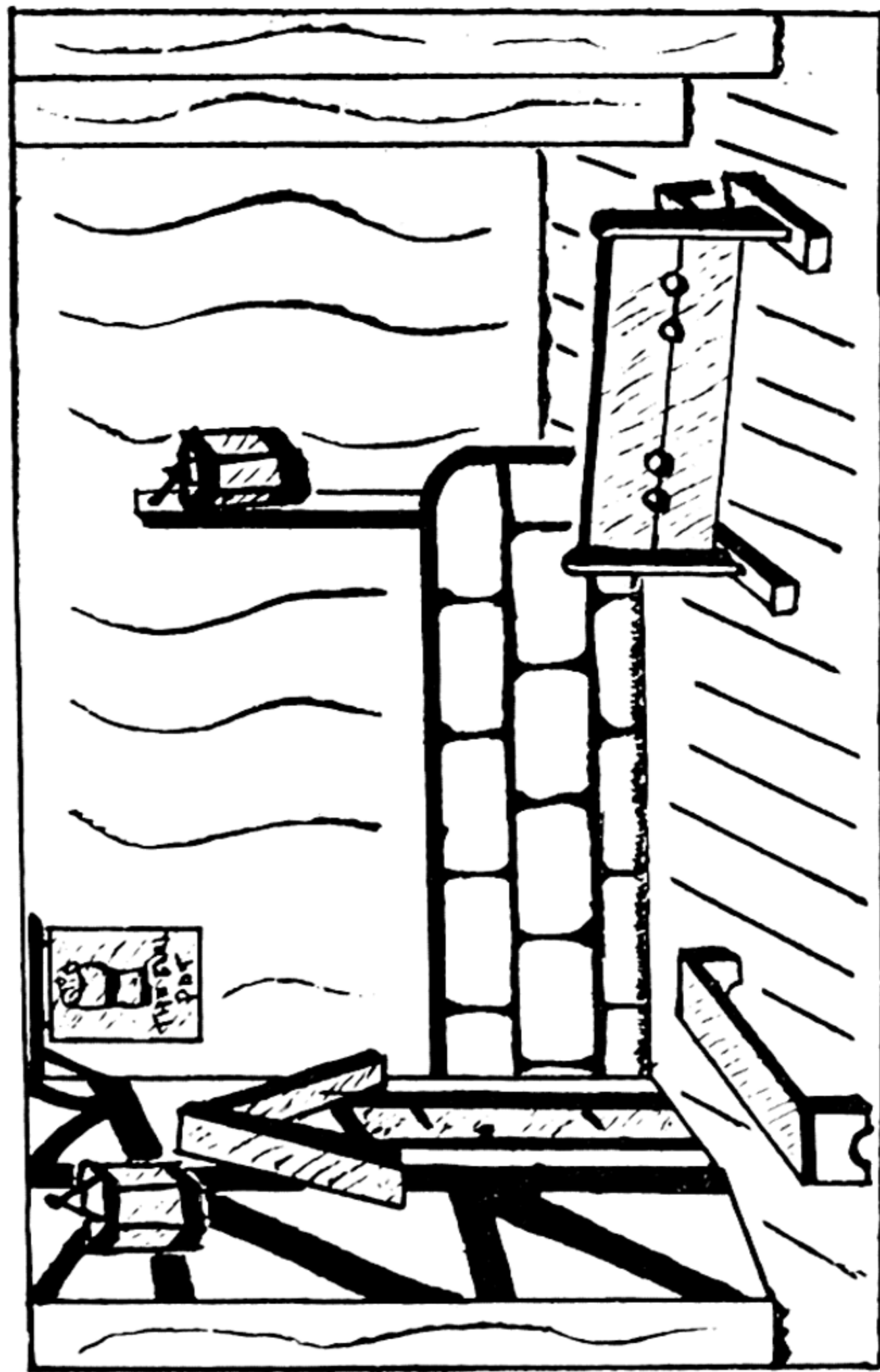


Fig. 27. Bill Howard's setting to curtains for T. B. Morris's One-Act play *The Tail of Fire* (Wembley Drama Guild Festival)

competitive festival with preliminaries and finals, where any team may be a finalist, the entire paraphernalia of all the teams is likely to accumulate by the evening when the finalists are decided upon; therefore, this type of festival should not be undertaken lightly.

The initial survey of the stage equipment and various facilities will have to be thorough. The committee will have to decide what furniture and equipment shall be made available to the teams. Typically this consists of the normal lighting equipment in the hall, plus portable floodlights and spotlights, some or all of the lights being connected with dimmers. Tables, chairs, rostra, and perhaps a divan, sideboard, or bureau usually suffice for the furniture. Well before the date of the festival the teams should be informed of the facilities and supplied with a plan of the stage in duplicate, one copy of which, showing details of the team's setting of the scenery, lights, etc., of their play, will be returned. Information is best given, and asked for, by means of a comprehensive questionnaire; this should show, when completed, the names and addresses of the society, its secretary, producer, and S.M. with 'phone numbers; the title, setting, and period of the play, the number of its characters, and its net running time; any special requirements, e.g. rostra, backcloths, steps, unusual items of furniture, or effects required by the team to be supplied by the festival authorities; furniture which the team itself will provide. (If the festival is competitive, it would seem fair that the use of properties and furniture supplied by a team should be restricted to that team, and that others should not be allowed to profit by their efforts and enterprise—but this is a matter of policy for the organizers.) Particulars of records to be used must be known, as it is the organizers' responsibility to apply for permission to perform these to the public. (Private recordings are not usually copyright.) Teams should be advised to have their properties identified; tie-on labels showing the name of the society, the play, and date of performance could be used. A warning about fire-proofing should be given, perhaps with particulars of the methods and formulae recom-

mended. Details of the lighting and sound effects (if any) should be clearly provided for, and if the festival S.M. is to be directly responsible for their manipulation, detailed cues must be shown. A final date for the return of the questionnaire and stage-plan should be specified, with a warning that requirements cannot be met with if sufficient and prompt information is not furnished. Some organizers threaten disqualification. In addition, the adjudicator requires a copy of the play. To supply this may be the responsibility of the festival S.M., who will sometimes choose to ask also for a copy for his own scrutiny and use; one copy may serve the double purpose.

All records thus obtained should be carefully filed for reference.

When all the material has been collated, a meeting of producers and S.M.'s should be called, preferably at the venue of the festival, as this will allow the teams to inspect the facilities first-hand. Points and difficulties can then be discussed in detail. As it is unlikely that all teams will be able to use the actual hall for a rehearsal, it may be wise, especially in a competitive festival, to rule this out for all entrants.

During the festival itself the festival S.M. should, if possible, only supervise, and delegate the various jobs to his stage-staff, with the members of which he will have been in close liaison during the previous weeks; but he should be able to take over any back-stage job at short notice (there should be no objection to his and his staff's having their own stage-management rehearsal at the hall). Clear notices should show the competing societies the dressing-rooms allocated to them, but the conduct and preparedness of the members themselves is the responsibility of the society's own S.M. Also a responsible member of the team (producer or S.M.) should report to the festival S.M. on arrival. The festival S.M. should make early contact with the adjudicator, who should be accorded the usual courtesies and attention due to a guest. He should be asked if he wishes the final set to be struck (as, properly, it should be) before he takes the stage to give his adjudications; he should also be consulted about the interpretation of the rules, especially

those concerned with timing, and he may appreciate being given a choice of position for observing the play; he will certainly *not* appreciate having to work in the dark, and, as trailing flexes are not approved of, he should be supplied with an efficient battery-operated table lamp. About the adjudication itself, he should be asked if he desires the front-of-house lights on or off, and if he wishes to have a table on the stage for his papers, and, perhaps, a chair for demonstration purposes. He may wish to have certain properties, used during the performances, available for similar purposes—or even a “model” to walk the stage; the model is likely to have to be the S.M.

In all festivals, but particularly in those run on competitive lines, the festival S.M. should hold himself at the service of the participants in a co-operative, but impartial, way. The various rules, which are his concern, should also be enforced with equal fairness. Although festivals are voluntary, it should be remembered that people who enter them do so because they take amateur drama seriously, and this may well mean over-sensitive nerves and uncomfortable tension, for which allowances must be made.

CHAPTER IX

TAKING IT FURTHER

The Stage Manager's Material

STAGE management, taken seriously, is an art that gives ample and interesting scope for research and experiment. No opportunity to enlarge the S.M.'s knowledge and experience should be missed. Research will take him into museums, picture galleries, and libraries; he should see as many amateur productions as he can, and look out for new ideas. Most societies will welcome an interested visitor back-stage, provided he is there to learn and to see how others cope with the problems of stage management. The more drama festivals he attends, the better are his own sets likely to be, for he will see not only many different types of setting, but also hear them adjudicated upon by qualified people.

We have said little of the professional theatre, which may suggest many ideas and set high standards, for there is a danger of the amateur striving to imitate a technique and form that ill accord with the amateur theatre. The S.M. will, therefore, take care to study and interpret the technique of professional stage management in terms of the small, moderately-equipped stage, and of the necessarily limited skill and experience of his actors and producer.

We have suggested he should keep his ears open for sounds capable of being represented as stage effects; similarly will he tend to observe everyday things with a calculating eye, for while everything appertaining to drama must be presented in terms larger than life, the final effect must be that of life as it is experienced (except perhaps in the experimental type of play); hence the S.M. should develop an eye for detail. He should carry a note-book with him for noting ideas as they

occur—perhaps on a train journey or during a conversation. (For example, the authors were in difficulties over obtaining a large oil-painting of a lady of the nineteenth century. A conversation with a photographer about tinting suggested the idea of colouring a modern photograph with water paints; a valueless photograph was thus made into a useful property.)

Bibliography

As far as books on the subject are concerned the S.M.'s material is inexhaustible. Some books deal specifically—or include chapters on—stagecraft itself. Others, such as those on architecture, English history, ancient history, period furniture, etiquette, etc., will serve for reference purposes. *Stagecraft*, by Hal D. Stewart (Pitman, 1949), contains a great deal of practical and useful information, but it needs to be adapted to the limitations of the small stage. It is well illustrated and includes a chapter on festivals. The book forms one of a series known as Theatre and Stage Series, which contains volumes on all the chief aspects of drama that the keen stage manager may well wish to examine, for his study should not stop short at his own particular branch of the art. Even more comprehensive are the two volumes forming a work entitled *Theatre and Stage*, which is encyclopædic in its scope and which is worthy of any dramatic society's library.

For the man concerned with improvising and equipping an amateur stage, *Modern Stagecraft for the Amateur*, by Gordon Lea (Pitman), gives an interesting account of the possibilities of conversion of some sort of large building; for a detailed and technical work on "Stage Planning and Equipment" from the more professional angle, he should turn to the book of that title by P. Corry (Strand Electric). This book should be immensely useful for any one responsible for planning, or advising on, the design of school concert-hall stages, etc. Anybody with experience of the average small amateur stage in Great Britain will realize the need for such planning, for seldom is a stage met with that is a hundred-per-cent convenient for the presentation of plays or festivals.

Practical Stagecraft for Amateurs, by Jevan Brandon-Thomas (Harrap, 1936), covers a wider field than its title suggests, for it includes chapters on production, organization, authorship, and acting as well as treatment of stage management. *Stage-Management*, by Peter Bax (Lovat Dickson, 1936), gives a comprehensive account of most aspects of stagecraft as we have defined it, though much of the book is based on experience of the professional theatre. Also we would differ about the methods given of marking script.

Since the average S.M. serves on his society's executive committee, and is generally concerned with its organization and efficiency, he might find *Organising an Amateur Theatre Society*, by Dorothy G. Mason and W. Jenkins Gibson (Lovat Dickson, 1936), useful reading. Some chapters have particular relevance to the S.M.'s responsibilities, particularly the helpful chapter on performing rights.

There are three extremely practical books dealing with drama festivals. *Drama Festivals and Their Adjudication*, by C. B. Purdom (Dent, 1951), gives an overall account of festivals, their value, the methods of marking, etc., largely, but not wholly, from the adjudicator's point of view, the author himself being an experienced adjudicator. For a novel and analytical treatment of festivals, we recommend *Festival Drama*, by Isabel Chisman (Methuen, 1949), which deals chapter by chapter with the different sections of the technique of the amateur theatre, using real examples and quoting actual adjudications. The S.M. should be particularly interested in the chapter on Stage Presentation. There is, too, John Bourne's *Festivals and Competitions*, another volume in Theatre and Stage Series.

It might seem strange that stagecraft could be capable of philosophical treatment, but the title of the book *The Art and Science of Stage-Management*, by Peter Goffin (Miller, 1953), suggests that it can be. This is a book for the study, not the workshop, but a reading of it may help to remind the shirt-sleeved S.M. that his calling is sanctioned by the dignity of "art" and is entitled to the respect accorded to a science.

Books having no immediate connexion with drama, but useful for reference, are unlimited. For English period-plays the well-illustrated series *A History of Everyday Things in England*, by C. H. B. and Marjorie Quennell (Batsford, 1923), will be found interesting and helpful, while a search for the correct motif when designing for the historical set may need to go no farther than the *History of Ornament*, by A. D. J. Hamlin (Batsford), or *The Styles of Ornament*, by Alexander Speltz and R. Phene Spiers (Batsford).

Articles and correspondence that are published in drama periodicals may help the S.M. to keep in touch with the latest ideas connected with stage management, and may help him to deal with specific problems; they will certainly keep him informed of plays, festivals, and general activities connected with the amateur theatre. Chief of these are *Drama* (British Drama League) and *The Amateur Stage* (Stacey Publications). These are periodicals. Some private firms that supply electrical equipment or effects apparatus, etc. also issue magazines of particular interest to the S.M. For example, *Tabs* (Strand Electric).

We hope that our reader will always remember that however small his society or drama group, guild, or institute, he (or she) plays a part in a nation-wide activity, the standards of which, though generally as high as they ever have been, still vary enormously. In recent years we have seen, through the television service, amateur performances of which no professional need be ashamed; on the other hand, every week there are dozens of performances throughout the country that merit not merely the description "amateur" (which we hope is losing its suggestion of mediocrity and patronage) but "inescapably amateur"—a term of criticism that all workers in the amateur theatre should fear and fight against.

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